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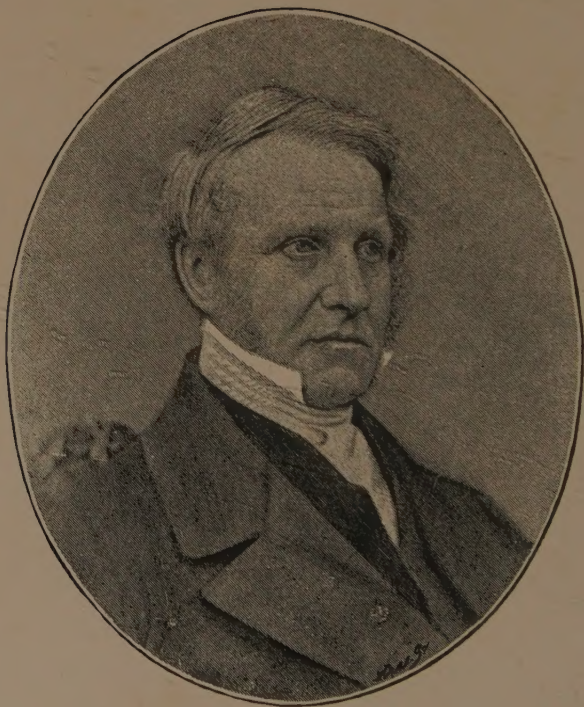
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STRANGELY LED.

The Personal History and Experience
OF
ARNOLD EDWARDS.



The Hon. & Rev. BAPTIST W. NOEL, M.A.

STRANGELY LED.

THE PERSONAL HISTORY AND EXPERIENCE

ARNOLD EDWARDS.

BY

H. E. STONE,

*Author of "David, the Man of God," "Friendly Words,"
"Christ our Example," "To Whom dost Thou Listen?"*

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1893.

To

THAT EVER GENEROUS FRIEND
OF CHRISTIAN WORK, WHOSE SYMPATHY
HAS SO OFTEN CHEERED WEARY
WORKERS AND STRENGTHENED
WEAK HANDS,

RICHARD CORY,

OF CARDIFF,

THIS WORK IS

Affectionately Dedicated.

Preface.

A BOOK without a purpose may amuse, but will not instruct. A purpose may be told without a plot, and truth surprise to action where fiction only arouses emotion.

This story is told with the desire to help young men and women who are asking questions concerning the "Divinity which shapes our course," whether the hero will be deemed poor or rich, commonplace or most unusual, matters not if truth be told.

The story rests on foundations of fact. Names have been altered both of places and people. Arnold Edwards is no creation of the fancy; his story is a common but striking instance of the many abounding proofs of the "Providential Guidance," at which the insincere affect to laugh.

With much diffidence and many fears I venture to offer this story to seekers after truth, and would bear my tribute in it to the memory of one whose name will be ever dear to me—the late

HON. AND REV. BAPTIST W. NOEL, M.A.

One of the kindly deeds of the late

REV. W. R. STEVENSON, M.A.,

was to peruse the manuscript of this story. Some alterations are due to his oversight and interest, and its publication was stimulated by his commendatory words. He has passed from this life, but my indebtedness to him abides, which I publicly acknowledge.

THE AUTHOR.

STRANGELY LED.

The Personal History and Experience of Arnold Edwards.



CHAPTER I.

LARGELY INTRODUCTORY.

Lo! while we are gazing,
In swifter haste,
Stream down the snows
Till the air is white.—BRYANT.

A COLD, snowy evening, succeeding a cold, snowy day—a north-east wind out for a frolic with its sister, the snow—morn had given place to noon, noon to even, and still it snowed, and snowed, and went on snowing.

The many narrow, and the few wide streets, the old stucco-fronted houses, the newly-pointed brick houses, of the ancient town of Dowchester, presented a grotesque and picturesque aspect, all form soon to be lost, for it snowed, and snowed, and snowed.

Tradesmen, tired of blowing their fingers to keep them warm, had given orders to close their shops. Young apprentices struggled with the wind for possession of the shutters, and it was a strong testimony to its kindness that in their efforts to get them into their places no windows were broken.

A stray vehicle or two, mostly carriers' carts, came

silently over the snow, or were brought to a standstill while the drivers debated, whether to go on home or wait in the town, under the friendly roof of some neighbouring inn.

Gusts of wind drove the snow whither they would. The dial face over the Market Hall was hidden, evidently to prevent it from telling tales; and, anticipating the social Reformer, all the signs of the hostleries and inns were covered up. The door-ways were blocked with drifts, the church-spires were fiercely attacked, and house-tops were covered. Evidently the wind was desirous of producing a miniature Norway or a Sahara of snow. Wind and snow laid violent hands on the gas-lamps and throttled many a flickering spark, leaving only an obstinate one here and there struggling in despair.

Dowchester was a town of some repute, situated on the only hill in that flat county. It boasted a castle, which had stood the onslaught of Cromwell's soldiers and cannon, and bore many marks of the accuracy of their aim. In the centre of the High Street stood the Market Hall; while no less than sixteen churches, "by law established," and some three or four unpretending (not law established) Nonconformist places of worship, were scattered through the small borough.

Dowchester had once been visited by our gracious Queen, and her Royal Consort, "Albert the Good." Around that visit for a long time all its history revolved. If a stranger happened to mention an interesting fact to an inhabitant, he would ask: "What year did you say? Oh! '41, that was the year before the Queen and Prince Albert came," or if another later date: "Two years after our Queen came."

The chief hotel of the town was a large commodious building near the Corn Market, whence regularly twice a week started the coach for London. The railway had been open some little time, yet the coach continued to run as before, for Dowchester's inhabitants felt safer on the old road than on the new-fangled railway lines. What a sight for the youngsters to see the coach start! Painted a flaming red, with driver and guard in like-coloured liveries—four well-formed horses in black shining harness mounted with silver—a flourish *on* the horn—a flourish *with* the whip—a flourish *by* the horses—and away dashed

the "*Highflyer*" or the "*Royal*" on its way to Chelmsford and London.

On the snowy evening succeeding this snowy day, there was no small excitement among the various companies of travellers and their hosts in the hostelrys of the town. Was the coach snowed up? Would Jack Mason (that prince of whips) bring her through such a night as this? In no hotel or home was there more anxiety than in the house of Charles Edwards, Grocer and Italian Warehouseman. He had gone to London in connection with the requirements of his trade, and Mrs. Edwards awaited his safe arrival with some degree of anxiety. While the good wife is watching for her husband's return we will make their acquaintance more fully.

Charles Edwards was the youngest son of a farmer, whose fathers for generations had lived in the village of Clinginghoe, some seven miles from Dowchester. In the churchyard of that village a row of tombstones announced that for over three hundred years the Edwardses had farmed the land and died in that parish. Charles Edwards had exhibited no liking, but on the contrary a strong dislike for farming, and had therefore been apprenticed, when quite a lad, to a grocer in Dowchester. By energy and enterprise he had made his way, and at this time was the proprietor of two similar establishments in the town. His family lived at the house in Head Street, and the off-hand shop was in Crouch Street, where the manager resided. The great majority, indeed nearly all his custom was derived from the farmers and from small shops in the villages around.

Charles Edwards' appearance gave you no idea that he came from a stock of farmers, for he was frail in build, a constant sufferer, and his form even then slightly bent. His broad, open brow was surmounted by a mass of nut-brown hair, and his eyes filled with the sparkle indicating humour, yet there was a seriousness withal, which gave a thoughtful cast to his thoroughly English face. A slight, but ever recurring lifting of his forehead, betokened considerable impatience. His wife, a perfect contrast to her husband, both in face and figure, was a plump, well-shaped woman, slightly under the medium height, with deep hazel eyes, jet black hair, aquiline nose, clearly defined arched eyebrows, and a mouth, the corners of

which seemed to curl, and *did* curl when Mrs. Edwards expressed her dislike without speaking. Such were Mr. and Mrs. Edwards then. God had given them ten children. Five they had laid in the churchyard of St. Mary's, and five (three daughters and two sons) were growing up to manhood and womanhood.


"There is the horn, Arnold. The coach is coming up North Hill." These words were addressed by my mother to me, her youngest child.

Then mother rose, stirred the already blazing fire, poured the boiling water from the copper kettle, made the tea, rang the bell, and bade the servant have all in readiness.

I think I see that parlour behind the shop now, its large old-fashioned fire-place, the huge sideboard (under which I have played with my toys many a wet day), and the air of cosiness over all so essential to make a home a memory of gladness.

In a few minutes father's quick step was heard, and flinging off his wraps, he was soon thawing himself at the blazing fire.

After having appeased his appetite, which had been sharpened by the long cold ride, he turned his chair from the table to the fire, and looking with a boyish, roguish kind of look into my mother's face, said: "Are you ready to move your tent and say good-bye to Dowchester, Mary?"



CHAPTER II.

A FIRE-SIDE TALK.

Believe not that your inner eye
Can ever in just measure try
The worth of hours as they go by.—MILNES.

M^Y mother's lips curled slightly: "What do you mean, Charles?"

"Francis and I have contemplated the arrangements, having decided to take the business of which I told you."

"Do you think this step a wise one?" There was a sound as of pain in my mother's voice.

"Decidedly; we shall make our fortune, Mary, and then if you like to come back to Dowchester you shall."

"Why are you not content here? You are doing well, even if slowly, and you have the respect of your fellow townsmen. I really can see no need for this move to London."

"It is a ready-money business, Mary; so different from ours here. The credit we have to give here is enormous, and it is only once in a lifetime such a chance as this comes. Besides," he went on, "Francis knows the London trade; he will take a good deal of the anxiety off my hands. I own I do not like the locality, but we must put up with that for awhile. We will take as much of the household goods as we require, and will have the rest sold by auction, unless we dispose of them with the business."

"Charles, I do not *want* to go. Do not think me foolish," here she laid one hand on his. "The church-yard holds our dear ones."

He drew her to him and kissing her, said: "They will be as near us there as here. It will be best to go, I think. Francis paid the deposit this morning, and we enter into

possession three weeks from to-day. So we may prepare to drink the health (in tea) of all the London people, and bid adieu to this sleepy old town."

So came the announcement, and from his tone I knew that father meant what he said.

We children—my two sisters and I—had been interested listeners. My eldest sister, who was about to be married, was not with us that evening. My second sister, then a girl of seventeen, and the third, a girl of fourteen, and I, aged ten and a half, all had something to say, and many questions to ask. My father answered us, and in doing so gave us quite a florid description of wonderful London. But that which interested us most, was the reason why this move to London was to be made. In brief it came to this: My eldest brother Francis, who was a traveller for a firm of wholesale grocers in London, had heard that a certain branch shop of a well-known tea house was to be disposed of. Situated in a low but densely populated neighbourhood, and making a large return, my brother was captivated by it. He wrote telling father about it, and begging him to come to London to see it for himself. The "satisfactory reason" for the disposal of this business was the failing health of the proprietor, and the large increase of his wholesale trade. The result of the visit was the decision to leave Dowchester.

To my father London seemed an El Dorado. Its very name possessed a charm. I have grown to manhood now, but I believe that many besides my father think so of London. Country ministers seek London as the ideal place for work. Is a London firm in want of a clerk, salesman, manager, or porter, how many applications come from men in comfortable country situations! A great whirlpool, vortex, magnet, gold-field, Will-o'-th'-Wisp—is London.

Matilda (my second sister) turned to the piano and sang, with her clear contralto voice, that never-to-be supplanted song:

"Home, sweet home,"

and when she ceased, father was knocking the ashes from his pipe, and seemed to be musing. Maybe the song had called up the little faces of those who used to play in that very room, but who now were away in the "better

land," for in all lives there are moments when the veil between the seen and the unseen grows thin.

The silence which followed was broken by my mother's voice: "Francis will marry shortly. Will they live with us? or will your new venture support two homes?"

"I think we could manage it, but time enough to settle about that when we are there."

"Couldn't Francis superintend the London place for awhile, to see if it does answer?" persisted mother.

"No, that is impossible, Mary. We shall need all hands in the new ship, if we are to make a good voyage!"

Much more followed, but it was time for bed; and calling the servants in, mother opened the Bible, read and prayed. Mother always prayed, not father, and I always knelt beside mother. Years have flown, but that gentle voice still rings in my ear, and while I forget other things, I vividly remember her hand gently stroking my head as she asked God to "direct and guide this family in the days so close at hand." Yes, I see the family at the throne of grace; I hear again the tremulous voice, and as I muse I pray, that so we may all meet again in the unknown future, not to pray, but to praise Him who "leadeth the blind by a way they know not."

Once more my sister struck the notes, and we sang together Ken's fine old hymn:

"Glory to Thee, my God, this night,"

and so closed one eventful day in my young life.



CHAPTER III.

LONDON, AS SEEN BY A PAIR OF BOYISH EYES.

They talk of short-lived pleasure—be it so—
Pain dies as quickly.—BRYANT.

OBJECTS seen with childhood's eyes stand out with marvellous distinctness, while much that happens every day is forgotten. The power of observation in quite young children is wonderful for its closeness and accuracy. I was a child of close observation and as a man retain clear memories of my childhood. I think the memory of most of us can go farther back than we suppose, and such memories soften us as with childhood's tenderness.

While preparations were being made for our removal from Dowchester, I was away at the village of Clinginghoe, some seven miles distant, where lived my uncle, who farmed a considerable acreage of the heavy and marshy soil of the district. On this farm the Edwardses had lived for generations past. It was a farm of equal portions of arable and grazing land, situated in a position of quiet beauty. The grass land, or the "marshes" as they were called, ran to an arm of the German Ocean, around which a long mud bank or wall stood to guard the land from the wandering waters of the sea. Now and then these walls failed to fulfil their purpose, and then it meant "loss" to landlord and farmer from the overflowing waters. No fields have seemed to me so green as these.

In my uncle's house the one topic of conversation morning, noon, and night—was the approaching sale. It had been arranged that I was to stay on at the farm, until the home in London was, as they said, "settled;" and my parents were ready to receive me. I wanted to see the sale! so I kept begging and begging until aunt said, "Uncle, take the boy with you; he can do no harm."

So one bright November day I mounted the seat in the

"gig," and uncle drove me with him to see the last of my home, my childhood's home.

• Having driven into the "Bull Inn" yard, and delivered pony and gig over to the care of the squinting ostler (who was always "a doin' 'is best," and who never touched his forelock unless the palm of his hand was crossed with silver), uncle and I walked to the shop in Head Street.

The shutters were up, and were adorned with large placards, announcing the sale. The "goods," the "stock-in-trade" as the bills announced, had been disposed of by "private treaty," but the furniture and other household effects were to be sold by auction. The large room over the shop was the sale room for these goods. Out of the cloud which hovered over my childhood there comes to view, as I gaze, that familiar room. It was filled with people and stacked with furniture, when uncle, holding my hand, led me in. At the far end, seated on the kitchen table, which served as a platform, was the auctioneer. I have had an instinctive dislike to that race of men ever since. In loud, harsh tones he was saying: "Our respected townsman, Mr. Edwards, having decided to remove to London, has entrusted me with the duty of offering to you the goods according to the catalogue." He made quite a long speech, during which I crept through the crowd and perched myself on a sideboard behind him, from which position I could see the people. That scene is as fresh to-day as when I saw it. I am back in that room as I write. I see again the tables, chairs, carpets, books, ornaments, sofas, sideboards, piano, all of which were associated with home as I had known it. And wedged in the open spaces were men and women, some chatting, some laughing. Some looking solemn, and some looking angry. Some scanning the catalogues they held in their hand, and others examining the parcels of books or the rolls of carpet that lay near them. I catch a glimpse of my father as he moves about, his brow lined, his face pallid, his lips compressed. Now and then, while the auctioneer is rattling on, I see my father nod his head, and I wonder why! Does he want me? No! it is the auctioneer he is looking at. Why he nods so often I cannot tell, and I turn to watch the never-ceasing action of the auctioneer. Sixteen, sixteen-ten, thank you; seventeen, never regret it, sir; seventeen-ten (here a nod from

my father) cheap enough, not half its value; eighteen, eighteen-ten, and a crack with the hammer on the table tells me the piano is sold.

At last all this becomes monotonous. I turn and watch the traffic in the street, my last look from those windows, and I catch myself wondering "Who'll live here?" and "Why is father leaving?" then drowsiness overpowers me. I am fast sinking to sleep when these words effectually arouse me.

"Beautiful canary, extraordinary songster, very tame!" I start up as these words greet my ear, and I see the man handing up to the gaze of the people, my bird, my own pet bird, which came out of its cage every morning and settled on my shoulder at breakfast, and always found its way, like a child, to the sugar-basin; my bird, that would perch on my finger, and to which I talked as to a friend. I cannot bear it—and, childlike, I scream, and then begin sobbing violently. Some kind hand leads me from the room, and finding mother, I cry out: "Oh, they are going to take away my pet—my Dick!" Mother tries to quiet my childish sorrow, telling me that I shall have another, it is too much trouble to take it to London, and a better one will be bought for me there. This is no comfort to me. It is *my* Dick I want, and, my uncle finds me disconsolate and angry, and so we drive back to the farm.

Some three weeks elapse, and one morning my brother Francis arrives; he spends the day with us, and on the next he and I take the coach from Dowchester to London. It is my first journey. We are inside passengers, for it is a day of drizzling rain, raw, and uncomfortable. For some time the novelty, the hope of seeing London, the changing scenes as we pass through village and town keep my attention. Then I catechize my brother. Is London a pretty place? Are its streets full of beautiful shops? Is mother well? and by-and-by the rocking of the coach sends me to sleep; so let the journey pass!

The shrill blast of the horn! The stoppage of the coach—Nelson—Bishopsgate—and in a turmoil of packages, shoutings, and a rumbling of passing vehicles we alight. My brother sees to the luggage, and soon we are seated in a cab and rattling over interminable stones. I look out of the window. Rain is still gently falling. Dirt, dirt, dirt everywhere. Muddy streets, dingy, smoke-

begrimed houses succeed one another with startling similarity. "We shall soon be home now," my brother says; "we are in High Holborn!" Down a street more dingy and dirty than any we have passed, and before one of the dingiest of all the smoke-begrimed houses—the cab stops.

I can see it is a grocer's shop. I am taken to a side door in a dismal-looking court; mother opens it. I bound into her arms, saying: "Oh, mother, what a dreadfully dirty place!" And well I might thus speak, for who that knew "Gray's Inn Lane" as it was then, will wonder at the keen disappointment its dirty aspect would give a boy fresh from the fields and lanes of a country village, or the clean streets of a small county town.

Tired as I was, I must of course at once explore the home—my new home. I found it one of those straight up, cramped kind of houses, common enough in crowded thoroughfares, very lofty, having stairs innumerable. Its front windows facing a once red, but now black brick building, or block of buildings, which I afterwards learned was the famous Inn, where musty parchments mouldered and poor thin clerks wore out their lives with a pen, "digging" sundry hieroglyphics into the parchment, which their faces rivalled in colour. The windows at the back of the house looked into our neighbour's yard. We boasted no yard. It had long since been absorbed by the demands of the business, and was now used as a store-room. From the windows could be seen a long narrow court or alley, over the entrance to which was a bedroom. Seated at last in the "little room," as it was called, I looked into a long, commodious shop. Some six young men were busy behind the counter, serving what appeared to me a small crowd of people, for the shop was filled with customers, whose aspect was entirely different from the rubicund, healthy-looking farmers who were the customers I had been used to see at Dowchester.


Women these were, nearly all; some had shawls over their heads, some stood bare-headed, all looked woebegone and tired. There arose to my ears a babel of sounds, amid which coarse laughter would now and then arise sharp and shrill. Still the scene attracted me, and I watched in silence, until mother, gently folding my head to her breast, spoke words of comfort, and led me to my room. There

she bade me be a good boy: "Remember," said she, "God is near you in this great city as in your old home."

I tried to sleep, but I could not. Long into the night discordant sounds arose from the court. Cabs and 'busses rattled over the paved streets, and when at last I slept it was to awake ere yet 'twas day, with the same rumbling thunder of wheels in my ears.

I came down stairs, unrefreshed and weary, and wondering what joy this new home could bring me.

How gently Time deals with us. As I pause to muse over the memories awakened I catch myself saying; "Dear busy London, dear to me by a thousand never-to-be-broken ties. The scene of my labour—my triumph—my love—my marriage. Many-sided—ever changing—nation-mingling—soul-world—London—wonderful—marvellous—seat of awful iniquities—centre of holiest activities—London!" Such, however, were not my first impressions.



CHAPTER IV.

A CRASH AND RECOVERY.

Think not the things most wonderful
Are those beyond our ken—
For wonders are around our paths,
The daily paths of men.—C. SOUTHEY.

DAYS passed . . . I was fourteen years old, when an event occurred which marked an epoch in my life.

Any reader who has followed me into the locality of my London home, will recognise a main thoroughfare leading to the termini of three of our largest railways. Out of this thoroughfare, courts and alleys run innumerable, with all kinds of names. In them people herded, one cannot say, lived. The revelations made by Dr. Letheby have since aroused public attention. Of two thousand two hundred and eight rooms which he visited, which were the abodes of beggars, vagrants, thieves, and the class that comprises the criminals, the vicious, the idle, and the casual underpaid workers at miserable callings, one thousand nine hundred and eighty-nine contained five thousand seven hundred and ninety-one inmates, belonging to one thousand five hundred and seventy-six families. The members of various families were in many instances occupying the *same* room, regardless of all the common decencies of life, and where, from three to five adults, men and women, besides a train of children, were accustomed to herd like brute beasts or savages, where all the offices of nature were performed in the most offensive and public manner, and where every human instinct of propriety and decency was smothered.

The shop to which my father and brother had come was frequented by these very people. The whole custom was derived from the adjacent alleys and courts. Many a time have I watched our customers coming and going. Some bearing the marks of ill-usage, some in a state of

partial intoxication, some far gone in consumption, dragging their wearied bodies and sinking on one of the chairs as soon as they were inside the shop. All with their ready money, for the small quantities of tea and sugar they needed.

They always had the best. The poor know and prize good tea, and hundreds would pass in and out of that shop, the poorest of the poor, who would, however small the quantity, have none but the very best. Such the trade, one incessant stream from morning until night!

The Earl Shaftesbury, then Lord Ashley, with other noble philanthropists, had been urging some legislative measures, and the enforcement of the Lodging House Act. As the result of their labours certain crowded courts became "condemned areas," and among these were the courts surrounding my father's shop.

I can recall long and anxious consultations held between my father and mother; then the dismissal of some of the young men who served behind the counter, in consequence of the diminishing number of the customers to be served. Then Francis (who had married) left. He went back to his old situation, and gradually one and another were dismissed until only one young man remained. All this occurred concurrently with the demolition of the courts and alleys, and the exodus of the population to other parts. At last a staring flaming poster announced "C. Edwards has taken premises a little lower down the 'Lane.'" Need I say both house and shop were smaller. I left school, and took my place behind the counter; tried my hand at window dressing, and put all my boyish power into the attempt to stem the tide. More "condemned" areas were cleared, the number of customers still decreased. Father was often laid aside, and at last nearly all the toil devolved on me.

My sisters had married, and our circle was a small one, yet it was as much as we could do to keep the ship afloat. Though better in health, father was disheartened, but after a little while the water deepened, the breeze arose, and we floated again. A young man was engaged for the shop, and I was free—no, not free. Father said I was to keep to the business; I detested it; and in a wilful mood went out one morning, and having seen an advertisement: "Respectable boy wanted," engaged

myself to be present every morning at seven (Sundays excepted), to do whatever duties might be required in connection with that business until ten o'clock in the evening. As soon as my parents saw that I really disliked the grocery business, they would have obtained for me a better situation. But I resolved to work on for the present in this position I had myself secured (and early and late did I work). Through the snow and sleet, fog and drizzle of a London autumn and winter, I wended my way to the "Strand." I felt that though this was work I was unused to, it would be best for me to learn to stick to my choice, at least for awhile.

One of the proudest days I have known was that whereon I placed my first week's earnings in father's hands, and I can still see the evident repugnance in face and gesture with which he took it.

From this situation I went to a wholesale house in the City; passing up step by step in a few years was in a good position, and in receipt of a good salary. During this time father had removed again towards the end of the Lane, nearer the railway terminus, but to larger premises and better trade.

So at a bound we pass the years that lie between. The crash had almost crushed; but recovery came.

My parents were attached members of the Episcopal Church. I had been taken to church, literally from my cradle, for I was a babe in arms when I was first carried to St. Mary's, Dowchester. At this church father was churchwarden; and there in the large square family pew our whole family had gathered. As a child I rather liked the amusement I found in packing up the prayer-books and hymn-books into church steeples, while the sermon was being preached, only I had to take great care lest the books should fall, for that would have aroused too many slumbering guardians and would have disturbed my quiet. In London my parents had found a home at St. Andrew's, Holborn, the only church where I ever was compelled, by the force of awakened attention, to listen to a sermon. It was from the then vicar, the text being, "Set thine house in order." It was then that Prince Albert, the noble Consort of our noble Queen, lay cold in death, and a nation mourned his loss. I record my actual experience. Hitherto, I had never heard a sermon

in the churches to which I had gone that had awakened or kept my attention. Was the fault all mine? When I was a child, in the square pew at Dowchester, I could quietly play all sermon time. When I grew up to boyhood, I tried to understand what the minister said, and would grow very weary trying. When a young man, I realised how dry and thoroughly uninteresting sermons were, and anon let my mind wander where and as it would. There is a change, a decided change for the better in this day. The Episcopal Church is awakening to the fact that more than the reading of prayers is needed, and she will yet awake to realise that less of the prayer-book and more reality in the sermon will alone increase the efficiency of her services.

I went regularly with my parents to St. Andrew's, Holborn, simply from respect for them, and from the force of early training. One thing influenced me more than I cared to admit then. I felt that the noble way in which my parents had met their reverse of fortune, their reliance upon God, and their hopefulness, were fine proofs that their religion was no vain thing.

Thus the wheel revolved; the fortune to be made in London had disappeared in smoke, but the persevering faith and energy of my parents had been rewarded, and the wheel was turning and bearing them forward once more.

CHAPTER V.

A MEMORABLE SUNDAY.

I am not worthy to be called
Thy child, my Father ; I so vile,
So long a wanderer from Thy heaven,
So long content without Thy smile.—J. S. PIGOTT.

THERE is, even in such a busy thoroughfare as Gray's Inn Lane, in the very heart of London, a quiet, a restful laziness, a tiredness, which reveals itself on Sunday as on no other day. Most of the shops are closed. Here and there a tobacconist's or a confectioner's window shows signs of life, but the air of drowsiness seems to settle even upon them.

The sun was shining in his strength, though the morning was not fully advanced. The bells from the various church towers were clanging and clashing. The busses were lazily wending their first journey. Drivers in light dust coats lolled back on their seats. Conductors, some of them in shirt sleeves, sat on the step or hung on to the strap, quite indifferent as to passengers. Now and then a girl with tanned face and basket on her arm passed down the Lane shouting in the penetrating voice of her class, "Creeses, eny warter creeses."

I was standing, ready as usual to go to church, when my father, looking up from the book he was reading, said, "It is time you were confirmed, Arnold?"

"Confirmed, father! Why should you think that?"

"You are growing up and are now old enough to take upon yourself the promises made on your behalf at your christening."

"I am no more fit for confirmation than that kitten," said I, pointing to one then rubbing its head against my feet. "You do not really think that I ought to go through that ceremony, father, do you? At least not yet?"

"It's time you thought about it and got 'fit,' as you call it. All my family have been confirmed and it is my wish that you should be."

"But," I still objected, "what good can it do me? If I felt I ought, or that it was wise so to do, I would, or to please you; but in my case at present it would be a farce, nothing more."

"Say not so," said my mother, "you know the Church requires this of us, and like good Churchpeople we obey her commands."

"Then the Church has no right —"

My mother interposed,

"Stop, Arnold! Do you think the wise and holy men in the Church do not know what is best? I am surprised at you. None of your sisters or your brothers objected, and I did not think my youngest would."

"Mother, I will not be confirmed. If I were what you call 'converted' or 'a saint,' it would be a different matter, but I am not; and until I am I shall not pretend to be," and with flushed face, and angry at heart, I left the room. "Confirmed, indeed!" I muttered to myself, as I turned into Theobald's Road, careless whither I went. "Confirmed!" The bells rang out clear and sharp, but they seemed to mock me. There is not much that is inviting at the best of times in the clang, clang, clang of most church bells calling people to service, and they sounded with a grating, rasping sound in my ears that morning.

I do not think that *all* my discontent arose from the expression of my father's desire. Other causes also were at work. The previous evening I had spent at the theatre, where indeed I passed a good many evenings at this time; and I had formed some companionships which did not in retrospect yield me unalloyed pleasure. This very morning, a sort of hazy idea that I was wrong had been floating like a fog around my "inner consciousness;" and just then to be told I ought to take a step which none but a decided Christian should ever take, roused me and angered me the more as the very demand made me feel decisively how wrong I was.

Through the gaunt, hungry-looking square at the back of the Foundling Hospital, through the sleepy, semi-respectable square near to the church built for Edward

Irving, and round again to the quaint, staid, old-looking Southampton Row I had walked, ere the hot mood had spent its fury.

"I won't go to church this morning." So I resolved, and sauntering through Ormond Street and Lamb's Conduit Street, I became conscious of groups of very respectably dressed people passing me, and the street became thick with them. Somehow or other I was led to follow, and turning abruptly to my left I found myself opposite a heavy, railway-station-looking sort of building. Crowds were flocking in, and listless, purposeless, indifferent, I also went up the stone steps into the gallery. I stood looking on, when an old woman said, "This way, please," and I scarcely knew what I was doing before I was seated in a pew holding a Bible and hymn-book which the woman had given me. From custom I bowed my head a moment, nothing more than custom, no prayer, no thought of it,—then I looked steadily at the inside of the building. Severely plain it was; the walls were bare, with the exception of marble tablets here and there, which stood out in bold relief, and told of the virtues of some who had been worshippers in days gone by. One of these, immediately behind the pulpit, was erected to the memory of James Harrington Evans, as a testimony to his faithful ministry. The building was a large one and it was rapidly filling. Under the pulpit was a platform, upon which a table and a few chairs were placed. A smart, sharp-featured man emerged from somewhere under the pulpit and seated himself at the table.

"Funny looking place for a curate," was my mental observation as he took his seat. I listened for the organ but all was silent, save the bustle caused by some late comers, who, like all late comers, were of course in a hurry and showed it. I looked for the font but nowhere could I see it.

Had I come into a chapel? Could such a congregation as this be found in any chapel? Thus musing, my attention was attracted to a tall elderly man, ascending the pulpit steps. After a moment's prayer he rose to give out a hymn and I had opportunity to observe him more closely. Bordering upon six feet in height, slim of figure, slightly bowed, hair rapidly silvering, and a face of real beauty. Kindness, thoughtfulness, goodness-tenderness beamed from the calm blue eyes. The ex-

quisitely chiselled mouth and the firm yet mobile modelling of his whole features made him look every inch the true gentleman. If ever a face spoke of goodness that one did. His voice was melodious, clear and soft. I was riveted. The hymn ended. The speaker looked calmly around the now crowded building, and uttered the words, "Let us pray." For a moment I bowed my head but I could not keep it bowed. Leaning my face on my hands I gazed at the man. I recall not the words of his prayer, but the attitude, the calm, reverent, childlike mien, I shall never forget. Hitherto I had been used to the people responding, but here all was as calm as a summer sky, and this one voice seemed as if it were that of an angel laying bare the wants of men.

Was I in a chapel? Impossible! I had heard they—the Dissenters—made nothing of "the prayers"! At any rate this *was* prayer, such as I had never heard before. Once only had I been in a chapel, and that was in a country village to a prayer-meeting, when quite a child. On that occasion a man standing up to pray in the next pew put his hand so near my face that I opened my mouth and closed it on his finger, which brought his prayer to an end, and caused my expulsion from the place; but that was long ago, and when taken to task at home, I replied, "He had no right to put his hand there." This, however, was very different. I felt I should have kissed *this* man's hand.

Prayer being finished, the Scriptures were read, and then came the sermon. It did not attract me, that is the sermon did not. I was expecting a liturgy or some much larger introduction to the sermon. The service seemed *bald* and *lacking*, yet I could not have told what it lacked.

"What place is this?" I asked of a young man who was descending the gallery steps just before me after service.

"John Street Chapel."

"Who preached this morning?"

"The Hon. and Rev. Baptist Noel, the minister of the chapel. We have a Bible class for young men in the afternoon, to which we should be glad to welcome you."

"Thank you, good morning!" Bible classes were not in my line and half afraid of the young fellow I walked briskly away.

But that man's prayer haunted me. What did he mean? "Be pleased, O Lord, to lead that erring, wilful young man to Thyself! answer his parents' petitions; gather him with Thine own." Did he know me? Did I look like an erring young man? That man's prayer! Every Sunday afternoon I had as a child repeated the catechism with the Ten Commandments to my mother. I knew them by heart. I could have said them off in my sleep with quite as intelligent an apprehension of their meaning as I had when awake; but this man's prayer!—and not a word of it in the prayer-book!

Reader, I am telling you exactly what I felt. I had been taught to regard all Dissenters as schismatics, I had been told that only the "lower orders" went to chapel, and more than once I had been led to regard deceit and trickery as inseparable from the conventicle. Not knowing and not caring, I never questioned this. Such matters the clergymen knew all about—that was enough for me.

When I sat down to dinner, father said, with stiffness in his very voice, "We did not see you at church this morning, Arnold?" Mother and sisters looked at me wistfully, I thought.

"No; I strolled into a chapel not far from here, and my word! there was a congregation!"

"A chapel, Arnold!" with a world of emphasis upon the word *chapel*, "how could you?"

Now I had no intention of going anywhere when I left home, so I thought it best to say so, but I could not refrain from adding, "I liked it, mother."

"That does not matter. It is your duty to go to church. Will you forsake your parents?"

My sister, whose husband was also one of our party, sneered, "We do not want any Dissenters in our family."

A hot word was on my lips. Mother's look checked it and I made no reply.

That afternoon we chatted about business, the theatres, the coming balls to which my sisters had been invited, while father dozed in his easy chair. All these subjects were allowed, but not a word about Dissent.

Were we a singular family? Were we alone in the wonderful pride of our church? Experience has not enabled me to answer altogether in the affirmative!

CHAPTER VI.

ONCE MORE IN CHAPEL.

Still, my Saviour, Thou art calling
All earth's weary ones to Thee ;
All her sad and heavy laden,
Still are bidding, "Come and see."—J. S. PIGOTT.

DURING the week following the events recorded the pressure of business allowed me but little leisure. Now and then "that man at prayer" would float before my mind's eye, but the remembrance was speedily dismissed. A week may make a wonderful difference in any life. It is marvellous how much the circle of one week can enclose. Before *this* week was over I was once more seated in a theatre, not far from Blackfriars Bridge. I mixed freely with my companions, had no compunctions of conscience, and found a decided pleasure in the play which I witnessed that night—*Romeo and Juliet*.

Sometimes a working fit seized me, and I helped father ; this was not very often now however. At the back of the shop was a square, wherein stood a church, in which preached a godly man, who had once been a priest in the Church of Rome. Thither on wet Sundays and when very tired with the week's toil, my parents went, the distance from St. Andrew's and our home being now too far for them to walk. They soon determined to settle at this church, and doubtless it was owing to this change that the subject of confirmation had not been brought up again. I went one or two Sundays with my parents, but I have no recollection of the sermon or of the people. One Sunday I spent with a companion in a cigar divan in the Strand, he teaching me the English concertina, of which instrument he was a perfect master. Thence we would wander through the parks and thus pass the hours

away. I remember family prayer had become a weariness to me, and I sought to avoid being present if possible. Thus passed a month or six weeks.

One wet, windy Sunday evening, towards the end of the summer, I was strolling through the square in which nestles the Foundling Hospital, and walking straight on, heedless of my steps. The rain came in heavier bursts, and I was thinking of returning, when I found myself once more opposite the railway station-looking chapel. It was somewhat early, the man was only then unlocking the gates, and, I know not why, perhaps for shelter, I sauntered in, up the gallery stairs, and took the same seat I had before occupied. Presently the old pew-opener appeared, and seeing me, came hobbling with Bible and hymn-book as before. "You will keep this corner seat, sir, as the rest of the pew is taken."

"What denomination does this chapel belong to?" I asked.

"The Baptist, sir."

"Is that why the minister's name is 'Baptist'?"

"No, sir," smiling, "his is a family name."

"Does this chapel fill well? I mean are the congregations large?"

"Ay, sir, you should just see the people. They flock in wonderful every Sunday, and no marvel, sir. It is not every minister that preaches as ours does!"

Pew after pew was soon filled up, and I found it quite interesting to watch the arrivals. The rain was yet falling heavily, and the gas shed light on an animated scene within. Silk dresses rustled. Waterproofs were flung off hurriedly, umbrellas fell with a rattle into the corners. Diffident, bashful creatures slid into their seats as if fearful of being seen, or as if they had no business there. Pompous creatures strode into theirs, first standing to survey the crowd, as if thereby conferring an honour. Fussy, chattering creatures arranged their ribbons, or leant forward to whisper to their companions or friends in the pews in front. Some, mostly aged men and women, bowed their heads, and then settling their spectacles read some favourite hymn. Then came that strange hush of expectancy, that incomplete silence, in which the human face can be seen in varied expression. Coughs were suppressed, and fans busy. The aisles were

by this time filled with would-be hearers, and the tall, spare, noble form and face came slowly up the stairs of the pulpit, his Bible under his left arm, his face calm, his step unflinching, his eyes fixed on the ground before him. The sermon that night was from the words: "*God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*" What a wonderful effect good reading has! The words were familiar enough to me, but as I heard them there they sounded as I had never heard them before. They were not dramatically read, nor emphatically emphasised, as I have heard them since. No, they were intelligent and impressive, because read with feeling. There was the vibration of a soul, the music of a mind, the flame of devotion all coming up out of the verse. To-day as I read that verse there come from it these sounds just as the child hears the ocean surge in the shell it holds to its ear.

Now, to a careless listener, few places are so dreary as the inside of a church or chapel when the "reading" is "gone through." The unbroken monotony, the uninspiring cadence, the spiritless letter makes it a blank or a preparation for sleep. This was just the reverse. I could not help listening. Holding his Bible in one hand, his finger enclosed in the place from which he had read the text, then stepping back a little, and drawing himself to his full height, in a voice of mingled tenderness and penetration, the preacher began his sermon. Gradually waxing warm he laid the Bible on the desk, and looked at his congregation with a gentle but piercing gaze. Now and again would he raise a hand, or, folding one over the other, stand pouring forth words of wonderful pathos. After a little while, however, my attention slackened, and I began to mark the effect of his sermon on the people in the pews. Some were gazing, evidently absorbed; all were attentive, and none asleep that I could see. Suddenly the speaker paused, this at once recalled my attention to him. Half leaning on the pulpit, he said: "I was in a Swiss chalet last year, and was asked to visit a woman, who I was told was in terrible distress of mind about her salvation. After a conversation of some length I opened my Bible." He suited the action to the word. "I read these words to her" (here

he repeated his text): "and asked her, '*Whom does who-soever mean?*' The old lady hesitated a moment.

" 'Every one, any one,' she said.

" 'Then, I may, without presumption, put your name in?'

" 'Yes.'

" 'I may put it in here, too?' said I, pointing to the word *world*.

" She nodded her head.

" 'Do you believe that Jesus Christ came to die for sinners because He loved them?'

" Another nod.

" 'What is your name?'

" She told me.

" 'Will you follow me as I read this verse?'

" 'Yes, sir.'

" So I read it thus, slowly: 'God so loved —— You are in the world, you know?'

" She looked at me. I went on:

" 'That he gave His only begotten Son that'—here again I read her name—'believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.'

" Closing the Book, and looking steadily at her, I said: 'Do you believe that?'

" 'Friends!' here the speaker's voice trembled as with uncontrollable emotion, "if you could have seen that old woman's face as, with quivering lips, she said: 'Oh, is it true? yet these are God's words! oh, wonderful love, me, *me*.' We knelt and prayed, and I left her happy, like a child calmed from fears." With passionate earnestness the preacher opened the Book again, then sending a swift glance around the audience, he said: "Thomas, Edward, John, Mary, Eliza, moved by God's Spirit have you put your name there? What I said to that Swiss woman I say to you: God *so* loves *you*! God loves *you*! That gospel is its own witness; receive the gospel and you receive the witness!"

No mind can picture the change that came over the audience; sighs as of relief were heard; a chastened, indescribable softness had come over the congregation. He paused, repeated the text, and ere I had recovered from the strange fascination which held me, "he was in prayer,"

pleading with God for any "whosoever" that might have been listening to his words that night.

I was dazed. I felt like one across whose mental vision had fallen a light too strong to bear. I was awed, smitten. As I laid my head on my pillow that night thoughts of God troubled me, and my almost unconscious utterance was: "*Why* does God love me?"



CHAPTER VII.

WILD-OAT SOWING.

The mind that broods o'er guilty woes
Is like the scorpion girt by fire,
In circle narrowing as it glows,
The flames around their captive close,
Till inly searched by thousand throes.—BYRON.

“**I** SAY, Edwards, will you make one at the Strand to-night?”

The speaker was my one friend, my boon companion. Holding a position in business similar to mine we were thrown much together. He was a fine, handsome fellow of about my own age. Fair curling hair waved above a broad open brow. His countenance ruddy with the glow of health, open-hearted, open-handed, strong of muscle, Tom Preece was the beau ideal of an athlete. Wherever he went he was loved,—so joyous, so free, so handsome. He was the only son of his mother, and she, a widow. They resided together in the East of London, in the pretty suburb of Clapton. I had kept my one secret from him, the visit to John Street Chapel.

“What is on,” I asked, looking up from the orders I was copying.

“Oh, just the thing to suit you, one of Dickens’ stories—‘Little Em’ly,’ and acted right well.”

“All right; where do we meet?”

“Some half-dozen are going to meet at the Royal, and then we will walk quietly down.”

So it was agreed.

When I arrived at the place of meeting three other fellows from the warehouse were already there. We sauntered through St. Paul’s Churchyard, Ludgate Hill, and on towards our destination.

“Why, Ted, what’s up! How quiet you are? Been jilted, or has your governor turned rusty?”

Shaking the feeling of quiet from me, I replied, "Nothing's up; I am all right, and feel just in the humour to play you at billiards if there were time."

"Done; I say, Strong and Lancaster, will you join us?"

Strong, a short, jolly little fellow, who was one of the clerks in the counting-house, answered, "No, I cannot; it makes me so late."

"Mater won't let him have the key; he gets into an awful scrape if he comes home late," sneered Lancaster, a limp youth, who had more money than brains, and whose delight it ever seemed to be to chaff at anything and everything good.

"My mother's name is sacred to me, and if you take it in vain, Lancaster, I'll send you home so that your friends won't own you." Strong's eye flashed fire, and there was a dangerous look in his face as he said this in a low, firm tone.

Oh how I liked him for this.

"Tom and I will play alone, let's have no fighting; hold your tongue, Lancaster, you never have been civil since you were born."

After I had said this, Tom whispered to me: "That fellow is a 'cad,' I would like to strike him myself; but I say, isn't Strong touchy about his mother?"

We entered the theatre, and were soon absorbed in witnessing the play. Old Peggotty delighted me, but a strange gruesome sort of feeling came now and again as I listened; more than once the words of the preacher came and mingled themselves with those of the actor:

"I'm a-going to seek her, fur and wide; if any hurt should come to me, remember that the last words I left her was 'my unchanged love is with my darling child, and I forgive her.'"

The actor threw a world of pathos into these words, and somehow they made me think of *that* Sunday's sermon. My engrossment must have been deep, for I was aroused by the tittering of my companions.

"Have *you* lost an Emily, and are you going out on the search? 'Pon my word, Edwards is crying; here, take my handkerchief!"

"Come, I've had enough of this," said I, rising; "I'm soft to-night, that's clear."

"No, don't go yet, wait till the snowstorm scene, Ted, and then we'll go!"

I stayed on, and was again riveted. Peggotty's earnest, whole-souled search for his lost Emily, the shrinking yet pleading form of Martha, and the strange sense that I was the one being sought for would mix itself up with the scene, and forced me amid my watching to think of Sunday and the preacher.

At last Tom and I left. Bidding Strong and Lancaster good-bye we turned into a public-house near the theatre, and finding one of the billiard tables unoccupied, settled down to play. It was a mere spirit of bravado to prove I was not "dull" that had made me suggest the game, and I played recklessly and lost. The company was uproarious, and I came very near to a quarrel, when Tom led me from the heated room into the cooler air without.

What is it that leads one so thoroughly miserable and dissatisfied as I then was, to wish and strive to appear otherwise, and to indulge in wild, loud sayings, as if thus one could hide one's wretchedness?

We parted at Holborn, Tom to go to Clapton, and I to slowly make my way home. What a tumult was in my soul! I had lost my money, I had made myself look very foolish, and all the while had felt unhappy. Was it that I was as the demon-possessed lad, whom, as he was coming to Jesus, the devil threw down and tare? If so, I allowed my evil passions sway, for the next evening Tom and I were at a music-hall not far from the Strand. We laughed at the coarse jests in the songs, drank more ale than would allow us to maintain our equilibrium, and were developing rapidly into so-called "young men of the times."

Need I say that for awhile my Sundays were not spent in either chapel or church. None the less was I exceedingly unhappy.

One morning I came down late, and while hurriedly eating my breakfast, mother said, "We miss you at prayers now, Arnold."

"Yes, I'm getting too old for that kind of thing."

Not a word came in reply, but looking furtively I saw her eyes filling with tears. I ate no more breakfast and soon hurried away.

Father once said, "Arnold, you keep late hours, you know *where* you spend your time; but I can only trust you are not sowing wild oats. Do that which is right and save regret in after years."

Would that I had heeded. My love for billiards increased, and between these and cards and theatres I was seldom home early.

It has been often asked, "Does God answer prayer?" Strange as it may seem, I never lost the habit of *saying* my "prayers." It was a mere form, of course, but the habit clung to me. My parents prayed for me. I never *heard* them now as I had absented myself from family prayers, but I knew, instinctively knew, that they did. Is prayer answered?

The clock from the neighbouring church struck eleven as Tom and I left the warehouse one evening. The business which had detained us was a press of shipping orders to be executed in a limited time. Sometimes (as the keys were left with those whose departments required these extra hours) we stayed late for other purposes than business, and when I mention that cards and boxing-gloves were kept in our desks my reader can give a shrewd guess why we were late some evenings. This evening, however, it was as I have said:

"Come part of the way home, old fellow," said Tom. Arm and arm we walked towards the Exchange. The city was fast falling asleep, there were few foot passengers, and not very many vehicles. Standing on the broad pavement under the Exchange, we were about to part, when two gaily-dressed, attractive young women, came up to us. Ready enough for anything like chaff, we soon entered into conversation. Tired of standing still we began to walk to and fro with them. Realise the scene. The quiet, almost deserted streets; two youths, both from homes of religious training, fond of pleasure, the great world-spirit fast binding its chains around them, whispering, in its syren-like voice: "Fling off home restraints. Be men." Two fair enticers enforcing with pretty art these maxims of the world.

Is there a God? Does He answer prayer? Many a prayer had been offered for these two young men.

We were standing still again, the women had almost gained their point, when, speaking in a loud whisper, I

said: "Tom, here comes our governor, and the chief clerk is with him. Do not move, they see us."

"Afraid of your dad," sneered one of the women, who had heard my whisper, but who evidently had mistaken my meaning as to the word governor, and she burst into mocking laughter.

What could we do? The girls turned with an insolent stare, as Mr. Lomax, the junior partner, said in a very distinct voice; "Good-night, Edwards! Good-night, Preece!"

"Wild oats," laughed the chief clerk; "early sowing though, lads!"

Once God sent His angels to meet Jacob when his heart was full of bitter thoughts and fears. Once God drove Israel to obedience with hornets. Were these men angels or hornets?

I drew Tom's arm in mine, and we walked hurriedly on. The women jeered us with cruel, stinging words and oaths, as we left.

Was a mother praying for her boy just then? What mysteries the strong light of the other world will reveal!

Oh, answer this, ye deniers of God:

How came those men to pass that way *just* at that moment?

Why were we not defiant instead of docile?

When I arrived home mother was waiting for me. I trembled as she kissed me, saying: "Good-night, my boy; you look tired." I slept little that night, and when I did, horrid dreams troubled me. Dreams in which Old Peggotty on the search for his lost Em'ly, was, with the strange mystery of dreams, turned into my mother seeking her boy; then the form changed again into that of a Shepherd, with wonderful eyes of love searching for His sheep. I awoke often, always trembling as I did so, and finding my eyes wet with tears, and the horrid laugh of unwomanly women ringing in my ears.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN AID OF THE ORPHAN HOMES.

In that storm

No man could hear his own cry on the wind,
But to the heart of Christ it pierced. He heard,
And casting off the chains of sleep, He rose,
And bound with them the waters and the wind.

THE next morning neither of us adverted to the scene by the Exchange Buildings, but busied ourselves with our work. For my part, I was so ashamed that I feared to mention the subject, lest the attention of others should be called to it. Speaking tubes were fixed through the house, running from workrooms to warehouse, and from the counting-house to both. The lad answering the tube which had just sent forth a sharp whistle, said, "Mr. Edwards wanted in private room of Mr. Lomax."

My heart sank, then my pride came to my assistance. "Nothing to do with him," I thought, "and if he says much I shall tell him so." Nevertheless, my heart was beating abnormally fast when I entered the little room. At the farthest end of the counting-house Thomas Preece was already seated.

Mr. Lomax, the junior partner, had risen from an office boy to his present position. He was a little fresh-coloured, smooth-faced, dark-haired man, with sharp, restless, black eyes; too much of a disciplinarian to be loved, but none the less was he respected, for he was a good man, held in some repute in the neighbourhood in which he resided. In a word he was too sharp, too distrustful, but honest and fair in his dealings with his own people.

He addressed me first: "Edwards, have you a mother living?"

"Yes, sir, both my parents are alive!"

"Do you want to break their hearts, and make your memory a sadness to them?"

I had not expected this kind of speech, and I was completely taken off my guard.

"No! no, sir!" with a rush of feeling, for his words had quite unmanned me.

Looking at us both, he said: "You know where I saw you last evening, and in what company! I was pained, but my interest in you and the remembrance of my own youth led me to observe your actions, and I am glad you left the company. Had you not so parted I should have had the painful duty of dismissing you from our employ." He held up his hand, evidently to check the words rising to my lips, for I looked my resentment—at what I thought his "grandmotherly" treatment. "I speak for your own sakes, young men; keep clear of immorality. I know many a fellow as bright as you, who has been ruined body and soul through this. I take it for granted this was your first temptation—your whole conduct makes me think so—there is no sin so demeaning, or that so soon destroys all that is manly and true." Rising from his seat, and putting his hands on our shoulders, he continued: "Dartrell, the chief clerk, has promised me never to mention this; neither will I. Will you promise me—both of you—to shun such company in future? I speak as a father; and also," he added, in softening tones, "as one who knows of what he speaks."

"I will," said I, completely conquered by his kindness.

"And I will," said Tom.

Mr. Lomax took our hands in his, and looking very earnestly at us, said: "God help you, my boys! Suffer me to advise you to seek God's help to keep your promise."

We felt considerably relieved as we came down stairs, and though inclined to resent the interference, we each felt it was a kind deed kindly done. Would that every employer had the weal of his servants thus at heart!

A few days after this, the senior partner—the founder of the firm—came through the department and gave to each assistant a ticket of admission to Drury Lane Theatre. A performance was to be held under distinguished patronage in aid of the Commercial Travellers' Orphan Schools.

Tom, and I, and a few like-minded, agreed to meet and go together.

Looking back through the vista of years, it is difficult to state how I felt as I took my seat in the pit of that theatre. Yet I am distinctly aware I had no disinclination to go; my feelings were rather of the opposite kind. For really good acting had a great charm for me, and while I shrank from the mere exhibitions of the lower kind, intelligent interpretation of real drama cast a spell over me. Moreover, the memory of that sermon and that prayer had grown more and more indistinct, and now scarcely ever troubled me. My promise to Mr. Lomax I kept, and felt somewhat satisfied with myself for so doing.

I say this, for I should like my readers to explain (if they can) that which follows, along the line of natural causes. I humbly ask any metaphysician, physicist, or philosopher to carefully study the cause which produced in me so startling an effect, remembering that my inclination, my will, my wish were all towards the play and its actors. Tom and I were seated in the theatre, chatting to one another, and to those near us, when the curtain was drawn up and the play commenced. The popular actors who had given their services were greeted with applause from the crowded house. We were silently observing them, when it seemed as if a voice distinctly uttered in my ears these words: "Suppose Jesus Christ came, would you wish to be found here?"

I started, looked at Tom, then to the one sitting next me on the other side; they were both listening intently to the actors. "Some fool playing off his jokes, I suppose," was my mental observation, but I could not settle down. In vain I joined in the applause; in vain I tried to fix my attention on the players; a dread seized my heart and seemed to hold it almost still. What should I do? Anyhow I must get out; but how could I? Nothing was more to be avoided than telling my companions; they would be sure to laugh at me. Just then the curtain dropped, and, snatching the opportunity, as the applause rose, I said: "Tom, mind my seat for a minute or two;" and fearful lest he should question me, I threaded my way to the side, and from thence darted through the doorway out into Drury Lane.

Once more the preacher's words, heard three months

before, came ringing through every chamber in my soul: "God loves you." It was a gusty night; the wind coming and going with fitful bursts. I had reached Lincoln's Inn Fields, passing through the quaint archway from Drury Lane. The wind drove the dust and fallen leaves around me, and it seemed as though the night was an emblem of my feelings. Strong gusts of remembrance shook me. I thought of my mother and her prayers, of my wild wayward revellings. Hot tears came unbidden, and fell unnoticed as I paced round and round and round that quiet centre in the busy western part of London. Sometimes I stopped and leaned on the railings around the plot of grass. I trembled in an agony of fear and doubt! How *could* God love me? I had never done anything to make Him love me. It was all nonsense, what a stupid I had been to go to that chapel; so I flung away the gracious thoughts, but they came back. "God loves me." Again and again I repelled them. "If God were to crush me, kill me, I could bear it," so I said. No hell of which I had ever heard could be worse than the hell within me. Every sin of my past seemed a hand dragging me away from the ever-recurring thought of God's love. I heeded not the hours until the thought darted into my mind: "Tom and the rest of them may come this way." Under the lamp I looked at my watch: half-past eleven. With the added fear lest I should be seen by my companions, I struck off through a court, across Holborn and Theobald's Road, and found myself opposite John-street Chapel. Impelled by a strange feeling of hoping to find comfort, I leaned on the railings and looked at the building. I saw, by mental vision, the loving face, and heard again the tender voice of the preacher, and rocking to-and-fro in my agony cried out: "O God, can it be? Is it true? Art Thou God?" What I endured there my pen cannot write; my blood is cool now, then it was tossing in fevered heat through my heart and brain. Trained in a religious home, every memory thereof now came to add to my pain. Dismiss them I could not. I had told mother I should be late home, so letting myself in with the key, I stole up to my bedroom. I sat awhile rocking my face in my hands, the very picture of despair. In a frenzy I flung off my clothes, and as I laid my collar on the dressing-table my eye caught

sight of the Bible—always kept there—given to me when but a child. I opened it, and these words gleamed from the living page: “*God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*” I took the Book and laying it open upon my bed I knelt down. My frame was shaken with another gust of sorrow as I did so, and it was some minutes ere I was calm enough to speak. Placing my finger on the verse, in a low whisper I said: “O God, my mother’s God, I believe! O God, hear me—I believe.” Not another word could I utter. I wept and wept, but as I wept and waited I grew calmer. The kitchen clock struck two as I crept into bed, sleep came not for some time, but no more gusts of sorrow, only a sigh forced its way now and then through my lips. The next morning when I awoke, I prayed for the first time in my life. I did *not* repeat the Lord’s prayer, as had been my custom; I just told God I believed Him, and asked Him to keep me and help me.

No ecstasy—no great overwhelming joy did I realise, but a calm, a quiet, my fear all gone, like a child that holds a promise and rests, confident of its fulfilment.

I told no one that morning, but I was down in time for family prayer, and ere I started for business I read a few verses from my long-neglected Bible.

Can any one explain this change in me by any natural causes? I was in a theatre; I was not thinking of salvation. From that night Jesus Christ has been to me a living Person, a present Saviour. He became to me my own Saviour, and I knew that I stood in a relationship to Him in which I had never stood before. Yet I had always acknowledged Him as the world’s Saviour. Now I knew He was mine. Why need men deny that every such change is supernatural—a miracle? “God drew me out of many waters.” He set my feet upon a Rock, and it is the sheerest vanity of ignorance that denies an experience so momentous and so productive of altered living. There is only one explanation: “Ye must be born again!” In the agonies of that night I was made a new creature! He led the blind by a way he knew not. I had from that time no love for the theatre. I ask again: Whence this change?

CHAPTER IX.

OPPOSITION.

A word will fill the heart
With pleasure and with pride,
It is a harsh cruel thing
That such should be denied.—LONDON.

WHEN the inner eye is illumined, how altered even familiar scenes appear. Hundreds of times had I formed one of the throng which streamed through the broad thoroughfares of Holborn, Snow Hill, and Cheapside, to that all-absorbing centre called the "City," and had viewed my fellow-travellers as only so many competitors for the first place, but the morning following the occurrences spoken of in our last chapter found me wondering how many of them were Christians. How many had sought the kingdom of God earnestly? How many had passed through an experience akin to mine? The worn faces of some fascinated me, and more than once I caught myself staring rudely with a kind of longing desire to speak to them of Jesus. Entering the warehouse, pressing duties took my attention, and beyond a nod of recognition no word was exchanged until the dinner hour came round.

"Were you ill last night, Edwards?" Such was the question with which I was greeted. "You looked queer or frightened; what was up, old fellow?"

"I *felt* queer, Tom; but do not ask me about it now, I will tell you after business."

The tone in which I spoke, or the feeling that I had been *really* ill, silenced my old companion, for no other questions were then asked. Many a time did I "lift my face" toward God that afternoon. Sometimes I felt sorry that I had promised Tom to tell him, I dreaded the encounter, and at other times I wished I had already told

him, and that the trial was over. Six o'clock arrived, and I found him awaiting me at the end of the street. I made up my mind to have the first word, so abruptly said, "Tom, I am converted."

He looked at me in sheer amazement, and then burst out into a fit of genuine and uncontrollable laughter. Ceasing for a moment, he looked at me again, and then yielded himself to another hearty laugh in which I almost felt obliged to join. Recovering his breath, and putting his hand on my shoulder, he said, "Why, what foolery is this?"

"What do you mean?"

"You were at the theatre last night, and went out ill. Do you mean that your sickness converted you from theatre-going?"

"Tom, I mean what I say; I am a Christian."

"Whoever thought you were anything else? I never took you for a heathen, any way."

"I am converted, Tom. A sinner saved by the grace of God!"

"Won't wash, old man! What old woman's money are you going to inherit by turning pious? Who has been wheedling round you? Edwards converted! Well, this is the best joke I have heard for many a day."

I put my arm in his, and walking on, said: "Tom, it is true; I went out of that theatre last night because I was wretched, and before I went to sleep I gave myself to God, and I know that He has forgiven me."

He hastily withdrew his arm from mine. "Don't talk nonsense. Do you think I am going to believe that you are converted in these few hours? Now tell me the truth, old man. Is your governor angry with you, or has your Mater talked you over?"

"No, Tom, no; I can only repeat what I have said," and then I told him all, and urged him to seek my Saviour too. Poor Tom! he thought it simply absurd that his wild companion could be so changed in one short evening. However, he saw I was in earnest, and on parting, said: "I am sorry! You have chosen your path, but never ask me to go with you, for I will not. I hate all canting, religious people; and if I thought you were going to stick to your new way, I should hate you, too."

The tears stood in my eyes as I wrung his hand, saying:

"Tom, I shall pray for you: you cannot stop me doing that!"

I see him now as he strode down Watling Street, a fine, manly, generous fellow. Oh that I *could* see him, even as I saw him then. Alas! he is among the castaways, ruined in character and life. Poor, poor Tom!

It soon became known throughout the warehouse that Edwards had turned "Methodist," and was going in for the Church."

Chaffing was plentiful and for days and weeks I met only scorn and contempt.

"Don't swear, you'll turn Edwards' brain."

"Have you seen a milksop lately?"

"I say, I met one of our fellows on Sunday with the *family* Bible under his arm."

"Going to the praying shop to-night?"

"He finds it pays."

"Sneaking way of saving money."

"Courting a rich old girl who hears him say his prayers."

These were some of the mildest of the taunts. Sometimes an oath would be flung at "all canting hypocrites." Often have I rushed in the packing room or into some quiet corner to keep my lips closed, except in a wail for help to "One mighty to save."

Another, and a far harder kind of trial, my old companions devised. They would gather in a knot close by me, and speak of their pleasures, of the places they visited, of their "larkings" and "tricks" and then turn suddenly to me, saying, "There, you see he is enjoying it." "Look at him." And, truth to tell, sometimes I could not help laughing at the recital of their performances. Then, mercilessly, would they assail me:

"His religion is only skin deep."

"Give him a few more weeks."

"It's nearly run out," and so on.

In the midst of all this, two things cheered me. My mother would sometimes accompany me to chapel, and would ask me now and then to join in family prayer, but I found it hard work to fight the good fight amid so many whose eyes watched intently, and whose ears were listening to my every word. Yet I found how true it is, "He giveth grace upon grace."

Some weeks passed, and I obtained a promise from Preece to come and hear "my preacher," as he called him. This cheered me much, and made me wish to be of use to my old companions. After Tom had been once or twice, he dropped the petty annoyances, and I gained courage to speak, not only to him, but to some of the work-people, among whom were some earnest Christians. Talking one day with them, one suggested that if we could find a room we might hold a prayer-meeting, and seek together God's favour on our old companions. There was no room in our warehouse that we could obtain, and I knew not how to get one, for the whole neighbourhood was made up of similar warehouses.

Engaged in the packing department of an extensive firm next door to us, as porter, was a middle-aged man, who lived on the premises. I found out in conversation with him one day (for he often had to come to our warehouse on matters of business) that he was a Wesleyan, and I mentioned my desire to him.

"Come into my room to-night, Mr. Edwards, and we will talk it over a bit."

So after business I went. He took me into his parlour, and arranged to let me have the use of that room every Thursday evening. Smith was quite a character, as I found out, ere I left him that night. He was a West-countryman, and had not lost that peculiar habit of putting "er" at the end of every few words. Before we parted, he said, "We'd better ask our Master's recognition, or He may not come with yer when yer meet." At one time I should have scorned spending an hour in the room of a "porter," but now very gladly I knelt with him. He prayed first, in a deep, almost sepulchral voice, "O, Lord-er we'er ha' come to ask-er Thy blessin'-er. We are unworthy, O Lord-er, to come, but we must come, for we have no wits-er, and Thou hast-er all wisdom-er. We are a generation o' vipers by natur', but in Thy grace Thou hast made us clean-er," and on he plodded, his very soul aflame with enthusiasm, yet his tongue unable to express his need in any other than the, to him, usual sentences.

The rest of the week found me busy planning for the forthcoming meeting. How should we make it known? It was a difficult task. Should we print some small hand-bills? No, for we only wanted the young fellows from

our own warehouse. Should I *ask* them? from that I shrunk. So I penned a letter, and addressed it to each. Its contents ran thus :—

Some of us are going to meet at—— on Thursday evening next, at seven o'clock for prayer. I shall be so glad if you will favour me with your company.

ARNOLD EDWARDS.

I gave one to each as opportunity occurred. Some read it and tore it to pieces, throwing the fragments at me with an oath, and telling me I was doing the devil's work in a monk's cloak. Tom affirmed his first idea was correct, *I was fast going mad.*

The evening came. With what trembling I made my way to Smith's room! I was first and alone. Would the fellows come? Would they make a mockery of the whole thing if they did come? Three of the workmen, all Methodists, came. Then Lancaster and Preece, until fifteen in all were mustered. I was afraid lest our good friend Smith should begin to pray. Earnest and genuine as he was, I knew that Tom would be convulsed with laughter, and then good-bye to anything like order or reverence. So I had to lead the meeting, calling upon one and another to pray. I asked one, a man of some fifty years of age, a local preacher among the "Bible Christians," to speak, and he gave a very suitable address. He spoke of the Lord Jesus as able to supply all our need. In words, full of tender pathos, he described our needs. I was surprised at the real wisdom of his address, and could see it "told." Some of the clerks settled to listen with a cynical expression, but this was soon dispelled, and all were interested before he closed. I explained the object of the meeting, and our hopes concerning "our warehouse," that it might become a centre of holiness, and a real home to every employé. As we left, Tom said to me, "One thing, Edwards, shows your sense."

"What's that, Tom?"

"You did not try any howling, canting tricks; and your man, who talked, did not bully us; if he had, we should have heaved the books at him."

Very successful were these little meetings. The head clerk came several times, and the junior partner joined us once. They were carried on until one of those changes

occurred to which all large business concerns are liable. Nearly all the "old" fellows left, and the new cared not for these things.

Sitting alone with mother one evening I asked a question which had long been puzzling my mind :

"Mother, why are babies sprinkled or christened?"

Lifting her spectacles from her nose, and looking at me from under them: "Why, because the Church commands it! All of you have been baptized!"

"Why was I christened?" I repeated. "To give me a name?"

"You know better, Arnold! The Church requires it, and our Saviour took little children up in His arms and blessed them, and your godfathers and godmother promised to see you brought up in the fear of the Lord."

"Who were my godparents?"

One, she said, was my uncle, at whose farm I so often stayed, and the other was her brother in Australia who had never seen me since the day I was christened.

"Mother, what *right* has 'the Church' to alter or add to Christ's commands?" I asked this solemnly—as I felt solemn.

With a sharp glance, as if half afraid I was laughing, mother said:

"Why, Arnold, what nonsense are you talking about?"

I rose, and reaching the Bible from the book-case, said: "Find me *anywhere* in this Book where infants are christened, or where the command is given that they should be."

"But the Prayer-book says so," said she, not offering to take the Bible. "It is the custom and command of the Church, and it takes the place of circumcision."

"True, I know you have been led to believe so, mother. But I know you love your Bible too well to disobey it. Never mind just now what the Prayer-book says. It is only the compilation of men, containing very many beautiful prayers, but also many sad and misleading statements."

I was interrupted, "How *could* I thus speak of the Prayer-book? Holy men had compiled it. The Church demanded obedience to its precepts, and to the rubrics contained therein." Not a word would mother hear against her dear old Prayer-book, and as for christening,

it was in the place of circumcision, and ought to be followed. I was setting up my judgment against men so much better able to judge than I.

Every word of this my mother believed, and I had been trained to believe it too, but I was feeling my way, trying the rocks, and I could find no "steps" in Scripture that led to infant baptism. I *really* wanted mother to help me, and hoped she would have found me some Scripture for its practice. Consequently I was very much disappointed. In my search I had found that none of the passages usually quoted for the purpose yielded any actual support to infant baptism. Therefore I did not answer my mother directly, and there fell a silence between us, and it seemed to me that if this was all mother could say in defence it was not much.

After another pause, "Mother," I said, "I am thinking of leaving 'the Church' altogether!"

"Oh, Arnold, it would break my heart to see you a Dissenter. You cannot mean it. Leave the dear old Church, the home of your parents and ancestors!" and hastily snatching her spectacles from her face, she gave way to tears.

Another long pause ensued. All my life I had accepted my mother as an authority upon matters of religion, and it was painful to me to rebel against that authority now. Yet I felt this was too important a matter to be decided on any personal authority, and was somewhat staggered that the Bible was not opened and texts given in proof of her position.

"Do you like the Rev. Baptist Noel?" said I.

"Yes, he is the only *gentleman* I ever heard among the Dissenters, and I am very much pleased you are so altered since attending his ministry. I believe my prayer will be answered yet. I devoted you to God from the day of your birth, and prayed God to make you a clergyman."

"What does father say to your coming to chapel with me sometimes?" I asked, avoiding the last reference.

"He does not like it, but I tell him I ought to go with you sometimes, as you are so changed and you like Mr. Noel."

The fire flung out its ruddy glare and showed my mother's face as in some Rembrandt outline against the shadow. She was looking up from her work, and her

features seemed wonderfully animated, as if the inner light of the soul were finding its way through the plastic features of the human, and making them radiant. I felt certain she was looking into the future, and thinking how near God was bringing to her the desire of her heart. Quite forgetful of the difference in meaning some words bear, I said slowly :

"I am thinking of joining the Church too."

Mother sprang to her feet, threw her arms around me, and said with choking utterance :

"I am so glad."

I saw at once my mistake. To mother the words "the Church" had but one meaning. To her the Episcopalian was the only Church.

To correct the mistake was best, so I added :

"I mean Mr. Noel's, mother."

Her arms were untwined, and her face hardened visibly as she said :

"No, Arnold, no, not a Dissenter! Do not be so foolish; what will your father and uncles say?"

"I must be true to my conviction, and the Church of England prayer-book is not true to the Bible, in the matter of baptism," but I hastily added, for I saw the storm rising, "We will talk about it again some other time."

Clearly I was to encounter opposition, not only from my old unconverted companions but from my own household also. I resolved, however, to ask the Hon. and Rev. Baptist Noel why he left the Establishment.

CHAPTER X.

CLINGINGHOE.

BEFORE the increased facilities offered by the railroad, Dowchester's royal coaches had at last succumbed. The man famed in all the county for his handling of the "ribbons" had retired in disgust, to spend his remaining days in venting his anger against the new-fangled notions, and to fulminate his prognostications of fearful accidents; for, as he said, "'Twas a flying in the face of the Almighty to travel at that 'ere rate." The pace of national life quickens slowly, but some were found who murmured even at the *slowness* of the trains. Not so the farmers and agriculturists of Dowchester and its vicinity. They generally summed up all discussions upon the railroads with these words, "Well, I ain't goin' to risk my neck behind them snortin' things."

Quiet, eminently respectable Dowchester, boasting of its antiquity, oysters, and cereals, was very Conservative. Never had a "yellow" been returned to Parliament from its ancient borough. True "blue" were they all, and none but a "blue" should ever represent them. All the squires were "blue," and as the tenant farmers were never known to differ from their landlords, they were "blue" too. And as the labourers had no minds of their own, they were expected to pay homage to their superiors, and were also "blue." Those were "good old days" when children and women bobbed a curtsy to master, missis, squire, or vicar, and men pulled their forelock in humble acknowledgment to their "betters." To remove the corn tax was a device of the 'man of sin.' Did the country need money? then let the Chancellor of the Exchequer listen to the novel suggestions offered at the tables of the farmers, they would soon show him what should be taxed. The farm labourers had no votes. Brave Joseph Arch had not arisen to air his 'nos-trums,' or to lead the workmen to think they had minds

of their own, or that they were any more than the goods and chattels of the farms on which they worked. What more did a farm labourer need than a cottage and the right to live; there was the Union for old age, and the Churchyard for the dead? More wages indeed! they would not know what to do with more money if they got it. And as for education, surely if they knew their A, B, C, and could count up to ten, what more did they want? All stuff and nonsense this craze of 'bettering the working classes!' let them live and die as they did in the good old times!"

It was amid such surroundings that my uncle lived, and his sympathy was entirely one with his surroundings. He was a "blue," and hated Radicals only one degree less than the Dissenters—the perfection of all wickedness to him. "What did we want with Dissenters? Wasn't there the church and the vicar, and if the sermons were not always all that could be desired, there were the 'prayers' to which they could listen and in which they could join." My uncle and aunt were Christian people. A more devout, kind, and generous couple never lived; yet, I verily believe, part of their religion was to hate Dissent.

At their house I spent my next holiday, which occurred just after the recorded conversation with my mother. I fully opened my heart to aunt, and told her of my conviction and intention. Very strongly did she advise me to say nothing to uncle, and above all things to be sure and go to church with him on Sunday.

Besides my uncle's farm, and excluding the Manor Hall, a fine stone residence opposite the church, there were only six farms in the district. The vicar was a quiet, unassuming man, but what *he* lacked his wife possessed. As was the case with all the farms, part of my uncle's was glebe land. Some months before my visit a change had occurred in the history of the parish. A Nonconformist had bought the adjoining farm to my uncle's, and he was the only Dissenting farmer in the village! With him I soon became acquainted, and many a pleasant evening did I spend in his house. There was no Nonconformist place of worship in the neighbourhood, so John Forgate drove seven miles to Dowchester, to worship in the Baptist Chapel, of which Church he was a

member. *This* was an offence in itself, but when it became known that he had actually given to the Primitive Methodists a plot of land at the corner of the main road, and that a chapel was to be built thereon, this became a scandal. This chapel had been opened some six months before my visit, and already had the common folk gathered in goodly numbers from the surrounding hamlets, as well as from Clinginghoe. All this I learnt from John Forgate, and right heartily did I sympathise with him in his efforts to break the "iron hold of despotism," and to remove the ignorance around.

Sunday morning arrived; a calm, radiant summer morning. Beyond the occasional lowing of the oxen and bleating of the sheep, not a sound was to be heard. Springing from bed and flinging the window wide open, I gazed upon the delightful scene. Far away in the distance gleamed the silver waters of the German Ocean. On the "marshes" extending to its sea-wall, grazed the cattle. Nearer still, growing crops were waving beneath the gentle wind. The whole air was laden with the perfume of the flowers which were growing in the garden beneath the window.

It was a scene of perfect rest, of delicious quiet. A Sabbath calm came on my soul, such as can only come when away from the crowded marts of men. Dressing leisurely, for it was early, I thought I would walk to see the new chapel. On my way I met my friend.

"I was wanting to see you, but I scarcely thought a Londoner would be up so early," he said. "The people have been to ask if you will preach at the chapel to-night?"

"Me! why, whatever would uncle say? Besides, I am quite unused to that work."

"May be that's why God put it into the heart of His people to ask. He calls most times when we don't expect Him."

"Yet would He not give some premonition or expectation in the heart of those He called to work?"

"Nay; Levi never expected Christ to call him. Nor, as far as I reckon, did that farmer Gideon: and I am pretty sure Peter never expected to be *told* to follow!"

"True, but—"

"Na, na! none of your 'buts;' I don't like them at

all. Think over it, and if you can say God has told you *not* to do it, tell me as you come back from church this morning, for I expect you will be going with your uncle?"

I had not made up my mind, as my reader knows, but I promised, and we walked together to look *at* and *in* the chapel, for the doors were kept unlocked.

When I returned, breakfast was ready; a good, old-fashioned Essex breakfast. Home-brewed ale first; meat, mostly pork and very fat; then coffee. That was the custom then. I had made up my mind to go to church, and was ready when uncle said, "It is time." He was always a quarter of an hour before time. I never knew him late for any engagement, and certainly not for church.

We talked of home and London as we walked along the highway. As soon, however, as we turned into the path across a field called "forty acres," uncle first, for we had to go in single file from the narrowness of the path, he said in a tone full of acidity: "Is it true you are going to turn Dissenter?"

"I am one already, uncle."

"I am ashamed of you, Arnold. I did not think you would be the first to bring disgrace upon us. Why could you not stick to the old Church?"

I was silent, for I could see a storm was rising.

"Setting themselves up when they're not out of their swaddling clothes. If I were Charles (my father) I would turn you out of the house if you came with any psalm-singing and spouting." Still I preserved silence. "Charles must be mad to have let you have gone so far," he went on. "I never thought I should have lived to see a 'meeting' in our family. God preserve us! what next, eh?"

As I gained nothing by my silence, "Uncle," I said, "I am sorry that my choice should cause you pain, but I have taken the step and cannot draw back. I am going to church this morning out of respect to you and to your feelings, but I intend to be at Dead Lane Chapel this evening." I said this firmly but respectfully, for I knew him to be sincere, and that to him Dissent was terrible heresy.

"Hold your tongue about it, do! Your tastes are lower than I thought, herding with the rabble at a conventicle!"

Of course I could have replied, that when that same

"rabble" came to church he was glad to see them ; but no more was said, and we entered the building where, for twenty-two years, he had been churchwarden—never absent, never late.

The church was a fine old building of the Norman period. Around its otherwise bare walls, marble tablets told of the wise and good whose bodies lie buried within the church. In the porch some half-dozen of the villagers had gathered, and the school children were being marshalled in the gallery. As we entered, the pulpit was against the side wall on the left hand in the centre of the building, it was in shape like an exaggerated egg-cup. Above it, projecting quite over it, was a large sounding board, the clerk, who was also the village smith, sat immediately beneath, and was known from his stentorian voice. Close to the pulpit were the squire's pews. In the far end near the gallery were a few tree seats or pews; and they *were* pews, perfect boxes, and when the congregation were seated not a head could be seen, except from the pulpit or from the gallery. The vicar commenced the reading of the lessons. There may have been twenty people in the church, certainly not more, besides the school children. Once or twice our devotions were interrupted by the sharp crack of the master's stick (not cane) on some unlucky scholar's head, and by the shrill howl which followed. But this in no way disturbed the vicar, who read on and on. After changing his white surplice for a black gown, the vicar opened a limp, black-covered book and began the sermon, and I settled myself to listen. It was a lovely morning, and through the open windows the sweet air stole in, bearing the peculiar scent of growing corn and dewy earth. In spite of my past experience there was a charm in the quiet, and I did devoutly pray that my spiritual life might be quickened. But how can I describe that sermon? The text was given out once, and in exactly the same low monotone the sermon was read as fast as any human tongue and lips could frame the words. Not a pause, not once did the preacher lift his eyes from the paper before him, and only ten minutes and a half had elapsed ere I heard the, to me, familiar words, "And now to God the Father." Then, after a minute's silence, we were singing a hymn and the service was over.

I cannot tell the keen sense of disappointment which came over me. I had gathered nothing, and when afterwards I shook hands with the vicar I fear I was barely civil. There was no service in the evening. One was held in the afternoon, and these were the only religious services in the village, until the despised Methodists built the little chapel of which I have spoken.

I did not walk home with my uncle but rode with my aunt, who always rode to church. Do you wonder, reader, that I spent the afternoon at John Forgate's? The choice I had made had truly shut me off from my relations, and I was clearly looked upon as a prodigal. If I had been steeped to my lips in sin, but had remained in the Church, I should have been welcomed and petted! But! an Edwards a Dissenter! Bah!



CHAPTER XI.

SENT TO SEARCH.

I AM back at business and my holiday over. Of that Sunday evening at the little chapel I have not much to say. When I entered it was full to the doors, and I quickly detected many of my uncle's labourers among the hearers. It was a congregation which made me glad to look upon. Sturdy frames, bronzed faces, and such a volume of voice! I spoke as best I could, but I felt poor was the best, and I ran home afterwards to avoid meeting any one; for shame was upon me that I had so feebly set forth my Master.

The atmosphere at the farm was decidedly cool after that Sunday, and I was glad to get back home. So here I am once more in the old warehouse; Tom as glad to see me as I to see him, and work a joy after so long a rest. I soon put into force my determination to see Mr. Noel; and one Wednesday afternoon, soon after my return, I was seated in the private room at the back of John Street Chapel.

"So you wish to join the Church, do you? How came you to attend this chapel?"

I told him all: my conversion, my trials, my wish to know more about Baptism. I can see the tears gather in his eyes as I thus spoke. Leaning slightly forward, he said,

"Have you read your Bible much?"

"Two or three times a day. Sometimes more."

"*Why* do you read it?"

After a slight pause, during which his tender eyes were fixed on me:

"To gain instruction."

"Any other reason?"

"For comfort, and to learn of Jesus."

"What have you found in the Bible concerning baptism?"

"Not much; I wish I could find more."

"Would you lend me your Bible?" and he reached out his hand for it. He then turned down page after page, and handing it back, said:

"Read where I have marked, carefully, prayerfully, and with unprejudiced mind."

"Would you tell me if baptism takes the place of circumcision?" said I, remembering my mother's words.

"You will be able to see that for yourself if you read the passages I have given you. Yet it will be as well to remember, circumcision was a sign given to Abraham *after* that he believed, and was a sign that he *was* a believer. Only males were circumcised. The covenant was national, and bears no relation whatever to baptism. Read however, and act as you are led. Jesus was immersed. There is no record in the Scriptures of any infant being baptized. Faith is to precede not follow the ordinance. Baptism is a confession of faith possessed, and therefore can in no way apply to an unconscious babe. You will have read that when Jesus took the little ones in His arms, He blessed them, *not* baptized them. He used no water, no ordinance. The only type or symbol of the cleansing of our souls from sin by the blood of Jesus is that of washing. The only symbol of our death to the world, is a burial; the only symbol of our rising to walk the cleansed new life, is a rising from a burial. Sprinkling is a device of man; baptism is an ordinance of Christ, and a command by Christ to be obeyed by His disciples; Go ye into all the world discipling, then baptizing, not baptizing them, and then discipling." Much more he said, and, opening an old volume, read,—

First example. When we read of those Christ is said to have baptized, John iv. 1. "He made them disciples and baptized them." First they were disciples, then they were baptized.

Second example. In Acts ii. 41. "Then they that gladly received the word were baptized." The occasion of this you have in verse 37; the answer in verse 38.

Third example you have in Acts viii. 12. "Read it." I did so. He went on reading. "Note when *they* believed."

Fourth example. Acts viii. 35, 36, 37.

Fifth example. Acts xxii. 16.

Sixth example. Acts xvi. 30, 31, and 32.

Seventh example. Acts xvi. 14.

Eighth example. Acts xviii. 8. "Beware lest you sin against such plain teaching."

He took my hand in his and we knelt while he poured forth a prayer as a father for his son. "Come and see me every Wednesday until your way is clear. Keep near to Jesus; think much of Him."

I was privileged to have six such conversations. Very patiently did Mr. Noel unfold to me the Scriptures, and I was struck with his complete absence of bitterness towards the Church which he had left. It was not until the last of these Wednesday interviews that he gave me some of the reasons why—refusing offered honours, he came out of the Episcopal Church and joined the Baptist denomination. Into the reasons he gave I need not now enter; only this must be said, it was from a study of the Word of God through which he was led to see the unscripturalness of a State Church—of a Church in any way controlled or supported, directly or indirectly, by the State. Sincerely desirous of obeying his Lord, he could not stay in a section of His Church where so plain an ordinance as baptism by immersion was ignored. It was no small sacrifice he made, for all his relations and friends were opposed to the step he took. Calmly and quietly as he spoke, I could see the scars of the battle were painful still.

"Do you see the fallacy of comparing circumcision with baptism?" he asked, and ere I answered went on, "Circumcision was entailed on Abraham and his seed and his servants. Baptism is not entailed upon a believer's natural seed. In John the Baptist's day many came to him to be baptized, and John met them with these words, 'Think not to say you have Abraham for your father.' Religion is a personal matter, and faith in every case must precede baptism. I shall propose you for membership with much pleasure; God give you grace to honour your profession."

So my decision was taken.

"Arnold, two gentlemen have been to see me about you," said my mother one evening as I entered from business.

"Who were they?"

"Deacons of John Street Chapel." My heart was in my mouth. "They asked me a great many questions about

you, particularly if I had observed any change in your life; and they told me you were going to be baptized. I told them you *had* been, and I could see no reason for your being baptized again. Arnold, why *need* you leave the Church?"

She drew her chair close to mine, took my hand in both hers, and bade me consider how it would pain her and the whole family. I listened until she had finished, and then told her my longings, my struggles against the conviction, all of which had been useless, and that I was compelled to obey my Lord's command. Oh, never to be forgotten hour! Mother rose to her feet, and, like some prophetess of old, placing her hand on my head, poured forth a prayer to God, commending me to His care, and when she resumed her seat, we sat in a silence too sweet to break.

The next day, while talking with Tom Preece, I told him of my intention, but I quickly repented of my confidence.

"Blest if I don't come and see you dipped. I say, Lancaster! let us make up a party; Edwards is going to be ducked."

Once more I was the butt of the wits. All kinds of etchings were slipped under my eyes. In some I was being *thrown* into the water. In others I was sketched in the act of *coming out*, drenched and dripping. A basin of gruel was ordered, and the housekeeper brought it me, saying she was sorry to hear of my severe cold! Going upstairs to the factory I received the contents of a jug of water, from whom I never knew. I kept my counsel as to the day, but keeping my temper was harder work.

The day came, and leaving the warehouse a little earlier than usual, I went home to pray. To me it was a solemn event, and I much felt the need of grace that day. The snow was falling fast as I stepped across the square into John Street, and I had to walk briskly to keep myself warm. On arriving at the chapel-house, I was welcomed by the two deacons who had visited my mother. Some six young men and one very aged one were already assembled. Very sensibly did these deacons speak, and most encouraging were the words they uttered. We knelt in prayer. I put on the long black gown, familiar to those who attend the ordinance in Baptist chapels, and, following one of the deacons, was led on to the lower platform,

the whole furniture from which had been removed, with the exception of four long forms, two on either side. The baptistery was of course open, and I saw it was a long marble tank, with a flight of steps near where we sat.

From our position I could see the chapel was crowded, but I was too engrossed with my thoughts to look round me. With the exception of that one glance, I did not raise my eyes. The sermon was characterised with all the peculiar clearness and earnestness of the preacher.

"Quit you like men," was the text.

My attention was soon engaged, for Mr. Noel began by describing the objections urged against immersion; then he spoke of "the warfare" and how we were to discharge our duties. Coming slowly from the pulpit, without any delay, he entered the baptistery. The women, of whom there were several, were baptized first. Some were young; some there were whose silvered hairs told of coming age. No music. No singing. All quiet and solemn. The deacons waited at the head of the steps, and a cloak was thrown over the candidates as each came from the water, while a friend stood ready to receive them as they passed under the curtain drawn across the back of the platform. Then it was I looked steadily at the audience. Not one of my companions did I see. The deacon took my hand, and, as he did so, whispered in my ear, "Remember Jesus; you follow His blessed footsteps." He placed my hand in Baptist Noel's, who said in a clear, resonant voice, "He that winneth souls is wise. Arnold Edwards, upon profession of thy faith in Jesus as thy Saviour, of which we have received credible evidence, I baptize thee in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen." While he was saying these words, I lifted my eyes and *there, right before me* in the front row of the gallery, *knelt my mother*. She seemed to be looking straight into my soul. With that sight photographed on my vision I was buried in the baptismal waters. With uncontrollable emotion my soul vibrated, and *her* words came clearly before me, "I prayed that you might be a clergyman; I devoted you to God as soon as you were born."

Through the thickly-lying snow I made my way home.

"Oh, mother, it was kind of you to be there."

"My boy, I feel you are right."

Who can tell the joy which I experienced? I look

back through the lapse of years. The crowded chapel, the dear old deacons, the holy man of God, all fade, while with ever-increasing distinctness that mother's face in the gallery is seen.

Do you wonder if the night of my immersion is to me a "night to be remembered."



CHAPTER XII.

“BIBLE CLASS MEMORIES.”

God is of the East possess'd,
God is Ruler of the West,
North, South, alike, each land
Rests within His gentle hand.—GOETHE.

ON either side of the chapel in John Street stood lecture rooms, in which were held the more social gatherings of the Church ; but the building in which the Sabbath School met was situate some half-a-mile distant, on the eastern side of Gray's Inn Road. This building was of considerable dimensions, and was made to serve various purposes. A day school was held there, which was of no inconsiderable size and power. The different agencies that owed their existence to the well-directed energies of the members of the Church held their meetings in the same place. A list of these would fill a page, and I will not trouble my reader with them.

As, however, the school building plays an important part in our story, I should like my readers to see it mentally as I saw it actually.

The external appearance was that of a substantial, grey-brick building, two stories high, some fifty yards back from the highway, with a door of entrance at either side. A plain, unpretentious building, which would be passed by unnoticed but for its squareness and size ; but entering through the door on the left and opening the one at the right in the passage one would stand in a lofty, well-lighted room, in shape like the letter T. At the base of the letter are some sixty cane-bottomed chairs, on either side of which rises a gallery fixed for the infants of the day school. At the top of the letter is a desk and a very high stool, on each side of which are some hundred and fifty chairs, so arranged as to face each other. A long oblong table stands in front of the desk, thus dividing the chairs right and left. Other rooms open out of this but

we will confine our attention to this one, as here I found myself on the Sunday afternoon following my baptism.

As I entered this room some two hundred young men were seated on the chairs on either side of the leader, and perhaps fifty young women were seated on the chairs at that part of the room which formed the base of the letter, and, *facing* the speaker. I afterwards learnt that one rule of the class was that every member might bring a sister or friend. Need I say there were more "friends" than sisters, but the arrangement was undoubtedly a good one, and the shape of the room lent itself to the carrying out of the arrangement.

Mr. Roberts, the leader of the class, was a man of considerable force and of unique character. At the time I knew him he was in his prime, some fifty or fifty-five winters having passed over him. Nature had given him a frame betokening considerable strength, a large, massive head firmly set on a pair of strong, broad shoulders, a soldierly bearing, and an erect carriage. His head was now partially bald and his beard short but thick, his features large, and his face deeply graven with lines, betokening at once thought and decisiveness. He had large full grey eyes, surmounted by black beetling eyebrows. Nose and mouth were exactly fitted to the massive, but not heavy face. One instinctively felt as one looked at him, that he was a man who would maintain his opinions; and further, that these opinions were formed after careful thought. His manner was almost lively, and his voice strong and deep but exceedingly flexible, and capable of intense pathos. Sometimes the vehemence with which he enforced his teaching was startling; at another time one was surprised at the flashes of humour which shot forth in his addresses. He showed ripe acquaintance with the facts of history, and with the discoveries of modern science. His treatment of the subjects he handled was quite unique, abounding with Scriptural references; and while he never used manuscript or note, it was clear that every address was carefully prepared.

Among the many men in the class, there were some whose tendency to humour would show itself on various ways, and when at times these restless ones disturbed us, he would quietly wait awhile and then resume his address apparently without taking heed of the delinquents. But

when the class was over he would find his way to these unquiet spirits, and with kindly words draw from them their history, their difficulties, hopes, struggles, and aims, and ever afterward the man thus singled out knew that Mr. Robarts was his friend.

To me the memories of that class are very precious, and the work done for God and for humanity by that quaint, quiet man no tongue can exaggerate. Two of the foremost evangelists of this day were led to the feet of Jesus in that class. Several who are pastors over important Churches first decided for God there. Among missionary heroes whose names are fragrant in the Churches are those who learned the value of Christian work from his lips; and not a few of the merchants, prominent for good works, owe their sturdy uprightness and Christian energy to the teaching they received in that class. Unknown to fame, and carrying on a small business in the west of London, this devoted man lived, often finding it hard work to obtain enough of the "bread that perisheth," yet never once uttering a complaint; and only when he lay cold in death did we know how severe had been the struggle through which he had passed. Brave, noble John Robarts! Thou didst a full day's work for thy Master, and thou hast entered into "the joy of thy Lord." Sadly we need such men to-day.

Among the friends whose acquaintance I first made at this class was one John Kerry, who was a clerk in one of the London docks, of weak frame and small stature, but very musical. He was baptized the same evening and received into the Church with me, and it was owing to his urgent request that I ventured to speak for my Lord. We both worked on Sundays in connection with a mission-hall in Clerkenwell. But John Kerry was unstable, and ever on the look-out for novelties. He was an enthusiast in everything by turns. For three months he wrote a letter to me every other day on some chapter of Scripture, and not only the letters, but the envelopes in which they were enclosed, bore signs of his peculiarities. After the address was written on the envelope he would fill up every inch of space with such words as, "Postman, do you love Jesus?" "The wicked shall be turned into hell." "Jesus died to save you." "Eternity." Many a time has the postman asked me which was the address, and no

wonder! for one envelope in particular came to hand pretty much like this: "Mr. Arnold Edwards." "Eternity."

"Do you love?" "Gray's Inn Road."

"Where will you spend it?" "London."

"Jesus died to save you."

So mixed up were the address and the questions on the envelope, which his warm heart but unbalanced head suggested. For, say, three weeks, he would be holding open-air services every evening. The next three weeks he would be holding little meetings in any room he could obtain.

Poor John Kerry! I love to think of him at his best, and I need to do so. I resolutely put away from my imagination John Kerry as I last saw him, and remember him only an earnest but erratic Christian.

One Sunday he prevailed upon me to go to some "rooms" in the south of London, where, as he said, "such precious meetings were held." My conscience smote me as I went. "For," conscience said, "why run away from one whose ministry is so blessed?" "Itching ears" is a common complaint with some. I am certain it never was my affliction, thank God.

We turned from the Blackfriars Road down some street the name of which I have forgotten. A queer kind of building, very much like a tea-chest in shape; benched, not pewed, and capable of seating some four hundred people. Probably one hundred were assembled when we entered, and service had already begun. Somebody arose, gave out a hymn, and then spoke. To my surprise John also rose and gave out a hymn and spoke for some time. Then another and another. I perceived no leader until a short, black-haired, red-faced man, without rising, said, "We will keep the feast." A white cloth was lifted from the table near him, and I saw a small loaf of bread on an earthenware plate, a black ordinary wine bottle, and a foot drinking glass, such as in the old days I had been accustomed to drink ale from. The brother who had last spoken was, I found, the "head" of this mission, really, although I was emphatically told they were all equally brethren. He poured wine from the bottle into the glass and prayed. I never heard a prayer like it, nor ever saw such peculiar action accompanying prayer. He doubled his fists and every

now and then struck out with them, fortunately in the air. Then his face would he screw up, until not a feature was in its place, and out of the corners of his mouth ejaculate, "Blessed! blessed!" I could not help looking at him. He seemed, one moment, in fearful pain, by the contortions of his face, and the next it was as smooth as a cobbler's apron. The prayer finished, he broke a piece of the loaf with his thumb and finger, and the plate was passed round. I should say by this time most of the audience had gone. Of those who remained each broke a piece off the loaf. Much to John's surprise I let the bread pass, and also the glass of wine when it was handed round. A hymn closed the service. On our way home I was silent, ill at ease at what I deemed the disorderly, irreverent manner of the whole proceedings.

We had crossed Blackfriars Bridge on the way home when John said, "Was it not a precious service?" In answer I complained bitterly of being led away from John Street for such a meeting, and he did not utter a word until we parted. I have attended many meetings of this divided section of the Church, but never such a meeting as this. I have heard addresses on Truth, *the* Truth, but I am persuaded that Pilate would have been kept alive till this hour if he had to wait for the answer to his question from them.

Strangely enough they drew John into their connexion. He went into Devonshire, sent by them to hold meetings. This severed our companionship. When last I heard of him he was using his musical talents on the boards of a London music hall.

Poor John! I am looking for his return from the far-off land into which he has since wandered, and where he is a prodigal. I cannot think of him even now as aught but a brother, though a wayward and erring one. Some day, surely, he will "come to himself," and then will he "arise and go to the Father."



CHAPTER XIII. 7

HARLEY HOUSE.

A FEW miles from London, on the route taken by the main line of the Great Western lies a rather fashionable suburb of the giant metropolis, surrounded by market gardens, rich with every kind of flower and fruit, interspersed here and there with beautifully wooded copse and "spinny." The limpid, sluggish waters of the Brent wandering on in its irregular course add picturesqueness to the locality. Standing in its own grounds, which sloped down to the river, was a large and solidly built house, over the portico of which climbed jessamine, clematis and tea-rose, each one trained with evident care. The velvety lawn with its well-stocked flower beds, and the newly gravelled paths, gave an air of precision quite in keeping with the prim but solid looking house. On the large iron gate leading from the road, a brass plate informed any casual passer-by that this was a Young Ladies' School; Principal Mrs. Wakeling. Here some thirty young ladies, daughters of wealth if not of fashion, passed the happy (or unhappy) days of girlhood or young womanhood. Mrs. Wakeling, the principal, was a woman of mind. Not that we mean her brain power was so far beyond the average of her sex, but her *will* was, as those who came under her rule knew well. In her early years she had received a more than usually good education, but alas! she was wedded to a drunken husband, from whom she resolved to be at least pecuniarily free. Mrs. Wakeling turned her educated mind to serve this purpose, and founded an establishment for young ladies. Sorrow had left deep lines on the thin worn face, and had taken the buxomness but not the grace from her frame. Beneath her locks of grey, flashed eyes as black as sloes and not unlike them in shape. Mrs. Wakeling was by conviction a Dissenter, and she, with the young girls in her charge, was seen in the Iron Chapel every Sunday. The minister, a Scotchman,

and Professor in one of the colleges of his denomination, was in every way fitted for the discharge of his ministerial as well as his collegiate duties. The dry routine of his professional labours had not, in his case, stopped the natural earnestness and overflowing sympathy of his nature. Still in his prime, with massive head, and body rather inclined to corpulence, with eyes of sparkling blue, and a luxuriance of wavy chestnut hair, Professor Falconer was a man of whom his flock was proud. Mrs. Wakeling's school was in his "parish," for he claimed all the suburb as his parish, and part of his work was to visit and instruct these maidens in the Word of Truth—a duty he faithfully discharged. Many a girl was led by him to the feet of the Master whom he served, and not a few became members of his Church.

In such an establishment, the characters, and dispositions, and positions of the girls were very varied. Some came from homes of luxury, wealth, and worldliness, almost spoiled in temper and marred with pride. Some from homes of comparative poverty, and a few from homes of piety. Some were without parent, some without brother or sister. India and Australia, and even China, were represented. It was a healthy moral atmosphere for these young women, all the more so because of the wise and tender influence of Professor Falconer. The one shadow upon the house was the man who had lost his manhood where many lose it, in the cup which does inebriate.

A potent factor for good there was the influence of the resident English governess, Miss Rouse, a suffering woman of a gentle and sweet disposition. Traces of her suffering were apparent in the frail, bent figure, and in the dark circlets in which her lustrous eyes were set.

Eleanor Rouse was, like her voice, softly, sweetly, tender; her influence was like the health-giving breath of early spring. Little "notes" were laid on the plates at breakfast on birthday mornings, with some fond remembrance and words of kindly counsel. She lived for those girls, and not a few hold her memory enshrined among the "sacred things" of girlhood.

One lovely evening towards midsummer, had we entered the garden at Harley House, we should have

seen Miss Rouse, walking slowly, with her arms around the waists of two of the boarders, talking earnestly. They often stopped to give rest to the frail creature who was literally the centre of interest.

The two girls differed much from each other, and both from Miss Rouse. The one on the left was Rose Chadbourne, the youngest of the three. She was tall and well-formed, of some seventeen summers, her carriage erect and firm, yet graceful withal, eyes of violet blue wherein honour and goodness dwelt, dark raven locks hanging in long curls on her well-shaped neck, and her parted lips showing teeth of pearly whiteness. The one on the right was Millicent Newman, the essence of good-humour and fun. Her hair was fair, her eyes hazel-brown, her face and figure buxom, presenting a marked contrast to her lithe companion. They were both the daughters of retired merchants, Rose being an orphan; not so Millicent, whose parents yet lived. Rose's father had taken to avaricious speculation, but he had died while able to leave a sufficient income for his family though he had lost heavily in his speculations.

"Professor Falconer tells me you are going to take the solemn step of joining the Church, Rose?"

"Yes; Millicent, Annie and Lilian Richardson, and I are going to be baptized."

"So he said; and that Mr. Spurgeon will baptize you, there being no baptistery at the Iron Chapel."

"I am glad it is so; but I wish there had been accommodation here."

"Naturally; you both owe so much to Mr. Falconer."

"And to you, dear Miss Rouse!" exclaimed both girls.

A quiet smile and a look of love was the only response.

"You have thought and prayed over this step, have you not?"

"Indeed we have. It is only once in one's life, and it seems almost more solemn than the ordinance of the Lord's Supper."

"Not more, Rose. The confession is more avowed, but both the ordinances are solemn. I must come and see you."

"Oh! you cannot bear the excitement, nor the journey to and fro."

"Girls, you will both be leaving us soon. Will you let me speak out my heart to you?" They made no reply, but turned their steps to the low garden seats facing the river.

"I want you to be brave, good women, careful never to dishonour the confession you are about to make. Be something more than the ordinary Christians we meet so often. In whatever sphere you may move try to elevate those by whom you are surrounded. To do this wisely you will need to trust your life every day, ay, every hour, in Christ's hands." She sighed deeply, and then resumed: "Be careful of your love. Never give it to any one who does not love your Saviour; and you will need, oh, so much wisdom in this, dear girls!"

"Not much fear of that," burst out impulsive Rose.

"Stay, my child." Miss Rouse buried her face in her hands for a minute, and then with evident emotion, as when some strong gust of wind sways for a moment the calm surface of a lake, steadying her voice, she continued: "Once I gave my love to one who appeared to be an earnest Christian. He attended the house of God with me, became one of the members, engaged in Christian work, was generous almost to a fault, in short, seemed to be a godly man devoted to the service of Christ. By a strange accident (as we say) his real character was revealed to me, thank God! in time to avert what would have been the calamity of our marriage."

Tears flowed freely down the agitated face, and she pressed her hands to her sides, as if in pain. Millicent and Rose waited in silent sympathy.

"Forgive me; the remembrance is bitter. Arrangements had been made for our marriage, when a letter was left at our house for me. I opened it and read these words: 'A friend would save you. She will call at seven to-night.' I wondered, and hesitated, but decided to see the individual. At seven that evening a wee but lady-like woman called. The substance of her story was this: She was married to ——— in Scotland, four years before. He had left her and her child, ignoring the marriage, which had been a private one. Later on each had signed a legal bond never to seek to see the other again. Only on these conditions was he saved from prosecution for some fraudulent act concerning her mother's property.

She had heard however of his engagement to me, and had travelled all these miles to tell me."

"Was it true?" cried Rose. "*She* might herself have been untrue?"

"Listen. I refused to believe it: and told her so. Quietly she said, 'I expected as much. Here is the copy of the deed of separation. My solicitors hold the original.'"

"I stared at the document with a hot fire burning my eyes; I know not how I bore it.

"'You will need Divine strength, miss.'"

"I could not help liking the woman, for she was evidently one that feared God. 'When do you expect him, may I ask?'"

"'To-night. That is his knock!' Oh, how my heart beat; I could scarcely speak!"

"'Shall I be with you when he is ushered in?'"

"'Yes! yes! it will be bitterness indeed, but it will prove if you are right.'"

"My lover, my love! for oh, girls, I did love him! was shown into the room just as we sat. He advanced towards me, casting a glance at her as he came. His words, whatever they were he had intended to say, perished on his lips. His colour fled, and face and lips alike were blanched. With a terrible oath he cursed her, then seemed to recover himself, and advancing towards me, was about to speak, when I asked him, 'Frank! it is evident you *do* know this lady?' With wonderful calmness he coldly answered, 'I *did* years ago. A freak of youth, you know.'"

"I know not how I controlled myself; my poor heart was ready to burst with the mingled emotions. 'Frank, tell me the truth, were you married to this lady?' He stammered a denial, then entered upon an explanation, during which time his wife never moved nor spoke, and I was dumb with pain.

"When he had ended she rose. 'I am sorry to be here on such an errand.' She spoke distinctly, but very slowly, as if the words were causing her a great effort. 'But *my* broken heart is enough testimony to your power of evil. I have shown Miss Rouse the copy of the deed of separation. I came to save her and you. I pray God this contemplated sin be not laid to your charge. I could

not rest. I had no right to rest until I had told the truth to the one whom it most affected. I leave you with no bitterness, no spite, and until death seals my lips I will not cease to pray God to forgive you.'

"She shook my hand, bade me good evening, saying, 'Some day you will thank me for this.' This roused me; I clung to her. 'I thank you now. I thank God for sending you, but I need His help.'

"He will give it; my load has been cast at His feet many a day since.'

"I went to the door with her, then passed upstairs to my room, rang the bell, and sent a message to him by the servant to tell him that 'I had been saved.'

"I heard his retreating footsteps, and then flung myself on my bed, and arose from it six months afterwards the shattered creature you see me now."

Both girls were in tears. Lovingly they folded the poor stricken one in their embrace, until the emotion had subsided which the recital of her wrongs had roused. The shades of evening were gathering as they moved on.

"Miss Rouse, how can we tell when one is real or not?"

"Only in one way; take all your loves, desires, wishes, to God, and, as in my case, He will save you. Look well to little actions. They speak more loudly of true character than the greater ones. Never listen to flattery, and obey at once the instincts of womanliness God has given to us all. But enough for to-night. I am going to rest; tell Mrs. Wakeling I am tired and too unwell to be present at the evening service."

"What a sad story, Rose," said Millicent.

"Poor girl! what a burden she has borne, and how calmly she bears it," was the response.

Next morning, Rose, who was seated next to Miss Rouse at breakfast, said, "I am going home on Saturday, not returning till after my baptism. Mother thought I should like to be with her and to hear Mr. Spurgeon preach next Sunday."

"Then I may promise you a really enjoyable Sunday. Mr. Spurgeon is so *true* a preacher and teacher of the Gospel he loves so much."

"Do you know, Miss Rouse, I think if ever I married I should like to be a minister's wife. One could do so

much good and be so helpful to a true man, engaged in so sacred a work."

"Oh! I should not," said Millicent. "Fancy making soup for the poor, and listening to the everlasting small talk of Dorcas meetings, and being so mercilessly criticised as ministers' wives are."

Next morning Rose Chadbourne went home to her widowed mother, visited some old friends, and met with a new one.



CHAPTER XIV.

MET, NOT MATED.

What heaven bestows with thankfulness receive,
First ask thy heart and then through faith believe;
Slowly we wander o'er a toilsome way,
Shadows of life and pilgrims of a day. —CHAUCER.

JOHN KERRY, one or two others of the teachers at Lyddington Mission Rooms and I, generally met on Saturdays to arrange for the services of the coming Sunday. We had laboured for some time at this Mission. Sunday morning we spent at John Street Chapel, the afternoon and evening at the Mission, and we always went from the Mission to the ordinance of the Lord's Supper at John Street on the first Sunday in the month. These occasions we never missed, they were seasons of strength, refreshment, and renewal to us.

One Saturday as usual we were discussing the plans for the following Sunday at the house of Mr. Hastings.

"It is my turn to take the 'Separate Service' for the children in the morning, so I shall not be at John Street all day. We shall have open-air service at the corner of Grill Place after tea, and it is your turn, Edwards, for indoors; but, if you will let me, I want to speak a few words also, as I am going to Devonshire next week."

"Oh! what new move now, John?"

"You know Mr. S——, one of the Brethren: he has asked me to go down there and take services for a month."

"Can you leave the Docks that length of time?"

"Yes; Mr. S—— is a director and has arranged for the supply of my place. A good thing for me, for you know I am feeling far from well."

"Very kind of him, John—yet I do not like your getting mixed up with the Brethren. I have never forgotten that meeting in the South of London."

"Ah! you are prejudiced. I find many good people among them."

"I dare say," I replied, "but are they *so* good they can never worship with any other Christians?"

"Well, you are not going, old fellow, so it is all right."

"What does Emily say to your going?"

Emily Hastings was John's affianced and was seated with us, so I directed my question to her. She cheerfully entered into John's plans and seemed to think he was taking the right step. More than this, she urged John to devote himself altogether to some kind of evangelistic work. But as one or two more teachers from the mission came in, and the conversation turned upon the work there.

Emily Hastings, who retired during our talk, re-entered with a young friend, whom she introduced to us as Miss Rose Chadbourne.

With an easy, graceful, girlish air, Rose Chadbourne was soon entering into our interrupted discussion concerning the Mission and the services. I had never before seen a girl who so much attracted me. Whether it was the gentle voice, which ever characterises the true woman, or the indescribable gracefulness of her manner, or the genuineness of her interest in our work, I know not, but my eyes *would* seek hers, and I became conscious of aroused interest in her.

After awhile she spoke of her approaching baptism, her hopes in the Christian life, and her indebtedness to Miss Rouse.

The house in which we had gathered was a large and roomy one, situate in the midst of a noisy street, abutting on the Caledonian Road; one of those houses which remain as a protest against the decay of the neighbourhood. Evidently it had once been a suburban residence, when Pentonville and its surroundings were green fields and pleasant meads; now it was enveloped in a mass of smaller houses, wherein as many families as possibly could resided. In the days bygone the Hastings had lived in tolerable affluence, but reverses had come, and they were glad to eke out their remaining funds by the help of music lessons given by Mr. Hastings. It was in those old days that the Chadbournes first knew them. Emily was still their friend, and the family had not discarded them in their days of trial.

The clouds, which had been lowering all day, became suddenly denser; heavy drops of rain fell on the heated paving stones, and we were startled by a crash of thunder that reverberated through the old house. The foot passengers ran in all directions for shelter, and soon the streets were clear, excepting for some drunken men who had been spending the half-holiday boon in the public-house. Reader, have you ever watched an intoxicated man in a thunderstorm? That was our employment for a little while, for such an one was visible from the window. At every crash of thunder and flash of lightning he jumped, as if avoiding a smartly struck cricket ball. The rain dashing into his face seemed to him as if he must needs fight it, and consequently he went through every attitude of the "noble" art of self-defence. Shouting to it to be quiet, and at last making one terrible lunge, he fell prostrate to the ground, to raise himself at last with a most ludicrous look of bewilderment. What a foe to man is the habit of imbibing intoxicating liquors—a habit which in some natures so easily leads to excess.

"You cannot go home yet, Rose; stay tea, will you not?" said Emily.

How grateful I was for that storm! What was there in this girl that made me so desirous of her company? An hour or two since I knew not of her existence, and now, look where I would, my eyes came back to that winsome face. What is there in goodness which is so attractive? I had seen handsome girls, I had seen beautiful girls, but neither of these words seemed to suit Rose Chadbourne. She was pretty; no girl with such clear deep blue eyes, raven tresses, and "good" face, could be otherwise; but it was not her prettiness that enchained me.

The storm passed but the rain did not cease. Steadily, steadily, it came, pelting the hard stones as if angry with them.

"I must go, Emily; I promised to be home. I dare not stay any longer."

At these words I rose, intending to obtain a cab, but ere I could fulfil my purpose, Emily's brother had darted from the room, saying, "I will be back for you directly;" and all the recollection I have is of stammering a "Good-bye," and standing like a raw country lad who for the first

time sees a bicycle rider, and never finds speech until he has passed.

All the next day that face interfered with my peace of mind, and without in the least knowing why, I walked to the Hastings' at the close of the evening, perhaps with some half cherished hope that Rose might be there. The weeks glided by, but the face was not seen.

In my addresses in the open air and at indoor services, I felt conscious of being able to win and keep the hearers' attention, but I found myself baffled by a strange sense of possessed power. I knew it was not either by the originality or the wisdom, the eloquence or the beauty of my arguments or speech—for I had none. It was not pride, that I can honestly say, for fear was my dominant feeling. I never spoke without trembling in every limb and muscle. Nor was it love of praise; I obtained that, though I sought it not. It was mingled pain and pleasure for me to speak; pain in my felt insufficiency and the inadequacy of my utterances; pleasure in consciousness of power, which clearly throbbed within me as a kind of prophecy. I found no pleasure in any kind of oratorical attempt. I won prizes for impromptu speeches but had no joy, no such sense of power, as when I stood at some street corner and spoke out of the fulness of my heart the story of Christ's love.

My pastor may have heard of my attempts; if he did so he never mentioned it to me. But one evening at a Young Men's Missionary Meeting he called upon me to speak. I obeyed him, but veritably "with fear and trembling." My pastor's presence awed me. I was not bashful, nor, except in a limited sense, timid, but the presence of any fellow-worker always tended to repress, and I never could be free under those circumstances. At times I refused all offers to speak at services, then another impulse would come upon me and I could not be quiet. Such were my feelings when one Sunday I formed an item in the crowded congregation at the Metropolitan Tabernacle. Who can describe the preacher there? His words played upon my soul as the fingers of the master upon the keyboard of the instrument. Forgetful of all around me, I wept, I laughed, I sat listening with all my life intent upon the words, as he described the future of the Church of Christ, and appealed for men to go forth with the

words of life to those perishing for lack of knowledge. I would have given anything to have had one word with the preacher, but his very greatness awed me, and I dared not seek the interview I longed for. Once again, for many times of late had the thought and desire held me, once again as I walked slowly home I debated the matter—Should I give myself entirely to the preaching of the Gospel? I was held back. My relatives repelled the idea; my success in business made it appear imprudent. My sense of unfittedness and a deep feeling of reverence were the bonds which bound me. Every service I took at the Mission *fanned* the flame; every tie I had in this life helped to *stifle* it.

At last, after much prayer and intolerable buffetings within, I made application to a well-known College in the Baptist denomination. This I was obliged to make known at home. Afresh burst out the torrent of denunciation. "Never was I to expect help; my life would be dragged on in some poor village sphere. I had no need to become a psalm-smiting, Dissenting minister." Only my Father in heaven knoweth all I endured, and as if to add to the burden, for a long time, no answer came from the College. Night after night did I come home from the city, praying with every step that God would hear my cry and open the way, and night after night to my inquiry, "Is there any letter for me?" I received the answer, "None," which fell like hail on my hot heart. At last it became unendurable and I went to the College. The secretary, or rather the under-secretary, said, "Oh! you are ninety-sixth on the list and the College is full." I came away without uttering one word, but full of bitterness of spirit. My mistake, I know now, was in not *seeing* the President, as the Secretary advised me. I searched my motives. No pecuniary advantage could I expect to derive. It was not pride that urged me, for I felt my unworthiness and insufficiency. Why did God delay the answer?


The very next day the junior partner called me into his office; I had not been there since Thomas Preece and I had been summoned after that memorable evening by the Exchange.

"Edwards, Preece is leaving to become manager at —, and we are thinking of blending the departments;

will you undertake both, and sign an agreement for a certain term, of course, at an advance of salary?"

Not waiting to consider I answered in the affirmative, and thus placed another barrier between the College and myself. Afterwards I did consider. I see now, though I did not then, how God was leading me.

In my new position I worked harder than ever. Tom and I seldom met, and when we did, it was with no renewal of our former friendship. He was plunging headlong into a "fast life." I was being drawn into the meads where the living waters flow. One fresh resolve I made and kept. Every Thursday evening found me among the worshippers at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, and many a revelation was given me there. When God helps us to be alone with His messenger, however great the crowd around (just as a mother, seeking her lost child, sees every face yet sees not one, until she finds her loved one), what flashings of light and wisdom do we see, even as the mystic Urim and Thummim with the ancient light! Is this news to you, reader?



CHAPTER XV.

NEW VENTURES.

Yet nerve thy spirit to the proof,
And blush not at thy chosen lot,
The timid good may stand aloof,
The sage may frown—yet faint thou not.

BRYANT.

THE day was closing in amid mist and rain. The city was emptying itself into the suburbs; omnibus drivers vied with each other in reaching their destinations, no need to wait by the way, as the conductor shouts "Full, inside and out." Railway carriages full, many passengers standing in trains going out of London, but carriages empty in trains coming into London, excepting here and there a compartment whose occupants are on their way to some place of amusement.

In one of the compartments of a first-class carriage by the six p.m. train from the West are seated seven travellers. They are from Harley House, their destination the Elephant and Castle, and from thence they are going to the Metropolitan Tabernacle. We recognise two of them—Millicent Newman and Eleanor Rouse. The other five are also girls from Harley House, who have come to make confession of their faith in Christ in His appointed way. They are shown into one of the rooms of that commodious building, known the world o'er as Spurgeon's Tabernacle. They are met by a sweet-faced lady, advancing towards middle life, whose graceful ringlets fall upon equally graceful shoulders. Her movements are tender and refined. Her rather full eyes seem homes of love and prayer. We mark traces of suffering, more in the mellowness of the whole face than in any particular lines. There is a frankness about her manner begotten of sterling integrity, and a winsomeness, combined with firmness, which evince great depth of character. Addressing herself to each

(and there are some twenty in the room), she easily wins their confidence, and removes any lingering fears. When all are ready she kneels, and in tones of sweet expectation and with words of intense feeling she commends them to God. Those who have been privileged to meet the large-souled wife of the Pastor of the Tabernacle know how sacredly, sweetly solemn, these little preparatory services are. Among that privileged number is Rose Chadbourne.

The service over, that solemn service when the life is publicly dedicated to the service of Jesus, Miss Rouse and her companions return to Harley House, Rose Chadbourne to her home. On the way to the station the next morning Rose called upon Emily Hastings. After some conversation respecting her baptism Rose said,

"I am coming back on Saturday week, and I should so much like to go to chapel with you, Emily. I should prefer to go to the Tabernacle; but I cannot walk there and do not like to ride on Sundays if it can be avoided, so if you will let me call for you we will go together to your chapel."

"Oh, do! only I go straight from chapel to the open-air service of the Mission, but that will be on your way home, so you can go there, too."

Thus it was arranged, and Rose went off to resume her duties for awhile among the friends at Harley House, and to stay for a little season in the loving affection of her governess, Miss Rouse.

"The Mission," of which our readers have heard, was situated in a street branching from the left of Exmouth Street, Clerkenwell. It was a building well suited to the purpose, consisting of two long rooms, one above the other, where the services were held; the upper room being used for the adults and the lower room, divided by sliding partitions, for the children. Clerkenwell itself is the home of watchmakers, engravers, jewellers, and fancy flower makers. One of its busiest thoroughfares is that which commences at the top of Mount Pleasant, or more properly from the Farringdon Road, running with various changes of name, but really one thoroughfare, through to the City Road. At the end of Exmouth street, Citywards, stands the Vestry Hall, abutting on five streets, in one of which is the Mission Hall. My reader will see that this

was a favourable spot for open-air meetings, the more so as one of the streets was seldom used for vehicular traffic, and here we generally held our open-air service after the indoor one had ended.

A crowd of four or five hundred persons had assembled. John Kerry had gone to Devonshire, and a good deal of his work devolved on me. I had been speaking some time and was announcing the closing hymn when on the verge of the crowd I saw Emily Hastings and Rose Chadbourne. After the service I made my way to them, wondering what had brought them there, and we walked towards Rose's home. I am afraid my head suffered considerably, certainly my heart did, as events will show.

My advance in business position left my evenings free to a larger extent than before. The desire to be wholly given up to the work of the ministry grew. I tried to quell it, but all in vain. Sometimes I yielded to my friends' advice and thought I could do more good by using my spare time in seeking to lead others to Jesus. I began to work at Field Lane Refuge, then situated on the west of the old Fleet, close to the purlieus of Saffron Hill and Hatton Garden. Once in the week I had the opportunity of speaking to the "casuals," a motley crew indeed, but these services stand out now with sharpened clearness as the years have fled. It called forth all my power to make them listen. They would nudge and leer at each other, cough and sigh as much as they dared (for the master of the Refuge was always there with me), yet I have seen them quiet down into an interested and attentive audience before the old, old story. On Sunday evenings they were gathered with the school, and many a service held among these outcasts of society is full of hallowed memories. Dear old Field Lane, now replaced by a new and splendid building. Long may the love of Christ constrain its master and its teachers to renewed exertion in reclaiming the wanderers!

One evening, as I was wending my way through the street leading from Gray's Inn Road to Field Lane, I saw a notice of an empty brewery to let. The door was open and I went in. I found it to consist of three storeys, each containing a large open room. Upon enquiry I found the rent was not heavy for the size of the building, but I was informed that the public-house adjoining must be

taken with the brewery. Day after day I found myself thinking of this building. I passed it often and always turned in if the door was open. I spoke to some friends, and at last, after much negotiation, and innumerable delays, secured its occupancy, *without* the public-house. Much had to be done to render it habitable. The floors were pierced with holes about two inches apart, which gave it the appearance of an exaggerated "cullender." These holes were stopped, seats were made, and at last we opened it for service. Perforce I severed my connection with the old Lyddington Mission, and with many loving friends we gathered the children and the people from the neighbourhood surrounding the brewery. Not once had I heard from College. I had not written or called since, but I kept wondering when the turn of "ninety-six" *would* come!

I visited the neighbourhood, found my way into the courts and alleys which abound there, and came into actual contact with the criminal and loafing class. Accompany me, if you will, only be prepared for much that will shock your sense of propriety.

We turn down a court about fifty yards from the old brewery. Walk gently. We are descending a much worn flight of stone steps, and now we are in the centre of a block of houses (!) running right and left, no thoroughfare either end. Entering the house immediately on our right and stepping down, we are in the room on the ground floor. In one corner is an old truckle bedstead; straw, naked straw, on the bed. Old sacks serve as a counterpane. Two of the window-panes are broken and stuffed with rags. An old woman begrimed with dirt is seated on the only chair. Two children are crawling upon the floor at her feet. On the edge of the bed a much younger woman sits, rocking herself to and fro, with that quiet, desperate "set" of the face so common to this class.

"Are times any better with you, Mrs. A——?" These words we address to the younger woman.

"Wus, sir; wus a deal."

"Why, what's amiss? Anything fresh since Sunday?"

"Bill's in th' hospital; took yesterday; and Sal ne'er earned a penny this week."

This woman is a widow; the old woman by the fire-

place is her mother. Bill is the eldest boy, who does "odd jobs," holds horses and carries luggage; Sal, the eldest daughter, sells bunches of flowers.

"What happened to Bill?"

"Fell off a ladder an' broke 'is leg. I on'y jest come from th' hospital."

"How many weeks are you back with your rent?"

"Two, goin' on three, and he'll turn us out next Monday if he isn't paid, and God knows whe'er it's to come from."

Wan and worn, consumption eating her life, unable to do "washing," though she tries; I have seen this woman often at the Hall. Body and soul have been kept together with Bill's earnings and Sal's profits. What are they to do now? In her grief the woman snatches up her youngest child and hugs it to her breast, while a low wailing "Oh" breaks from her lips.

"Do not worry; we will see to the rent for you," and we pass upstairs.

This room is a copy of the one downstairs, only we miss the bedstead. We see some sacks on the floor; doubtless these form all the bed they have.

Sitting cross-legged on the floor is a man. Vicious black eyes gleam upon us from a brutal face. Hair, close cropped; clothes, ragged. A woman is ironing some articles of clothing at the table (!), which is a board placed across two boxes. She is a living skeleton. It is positively painful to see her thin arms moving to and fro with her work.

"How do you do? Any work?" and I shake hands with the woman and the man.

He replies, "Ain't none. Been out all day and hain't seen tail of any."

"I'm hurryin' this here ironing to get summat to eat," says the woman.

"How long'll yer be?" This from the man to the woman.

The woman sighs wearily. "Not long now, Jim. Ten minutes or more."

The man rises, passes me, goes downstairs.

"He's only waitin' till I been 'ome with these here and he'll take the browns to the 'tap.'" She lowers her voice. "He's worse nor ever sin' he come out."

Reader, this means that the man is fresh from gaol, that he will *make* his wife give him the money she so hardly earns, and he will spend it in drink.

"But I would not give it to him," you cry in virtuous indignation. Oh ye who stand off and philosophize about these matters, how you would alter your speech if you came nearer to them!

He will follow that poor creature to the house when she carries the ironing home, wait until she comes out, then with a gruff, "Gie it me," snatch it from her hand, giving her back a penny, maybe, to "get something with." Should she refuse? Ask her. If you are a woman she will show you her breast, blue and yellow. Lifting her ragged skirt she will show you the mark of his boot on her leg, and if you are bold enough she will take your hand and, lifting her tresses, run it over a scar, which her hair hides from view.

One room more. The top one. What a change! Here a wooden bedstead and a bed, a table, three chairs, and other little pieces of furniture, old, it is true. Two young women are stitching away at some men's clothing. They rise and shake hands as we enter. "We heard your voice below, and thought you would be coming up."

"Still at work, I see?" for they are plying their needles. They have no time to sit idle; every moment is something to them.

"Yes, and glad enough to get it, sir."

These girls are needy orphans. They both attend the Mission Hall. Mother is dead; they know nothing of their father, he left them seven years since. By dint of dogged perseverance they have maintained themselves; and two more respectable girls it would be hard to find.

Do you ask why they live in such a place? The accommodation is the best they can get for the rent they can pay. They live unharmed and unmolested, for which, no doubt, their ready acts of kindness to their neighbours partly account, but the chief reason is that they are sincere Christians. Amid what strange surroundings grace can flourish!

Across this court and down another. We push open a door. A candle in the mouth of a bottle is burning on the chimney board. What a fearful smell! Step back for a mouthful of the fresher air outside, then be careful

as you step down into the room. Two heaps of straw, one on either side. On the heaps, uncovered, save for their clothing, are two men. They are moaning uneasily, and now and then a thick incoherent sentence escapes their lips. I am about to go nearer, when a woman enters, and taking hold of my arm, she drags me into the court.

"Yer can do 'em no good, Mr. Edwards. They be both 'lirious,' and they be comin' to fetch 'em directly."

I know the woman. Who that visits the court does not? but she is sober now. "Why, what is the matter, Eliza?"

"They are both down wi' black typhus. If they was conscious yer might do 'em good. Comin' from the house directly for 'em."

This in London! Yes, and much more. Cover it? No, *uncover* it. Let the light in. It is the light of the kindness of God's love shining upon these His creatures which they need.



CHAPTER XVI.

FATE OR FANCY, OR NEITHER.

Not only here
The rich result of all our God doth teach
His scholars, slow at best, until we reach
A nobler sphere.—HAVERGAL.

AMID such scenes and surroundings the work was carried on. Long prior to my closer attention to the work of the Mission Hall I had joined a Young Men's Mutual Improvement Society. This was held in the schoolroom of a small chapel, known as "Zion." Here I had ventured upon my first recitation, when one of my critics informed me, I spoke as if I had an apple in my mouth; while another kindly added that my hands were evidently a trouble to me, for I was trying to hide them all through the recitation. Time and perseverance had caused some improvement, and the apple had now gone from my mouth. It was in this room I listened to John Cassell—that fine specimen of an Englishman and embodiment of persistent, intelligent toil. He was one of the lecturers to whom we listened month by month. The Society did me much good. The criticisms were sharp, but not bitter. No one was spared; no one wished to be. The annual meeting was held in the chapel itself, and more than once then, I found myself wishing the building was at my disposal. But that was in the early days of my Christian life. Increasing work at the Mission, as I have said, led to my withdrawal from that and kindred Societies. But, "Zion" memories were very pleasant.

Thursday evenings were now devoted to a service at the old brewery; and at the close of one such service a man and his wife stayed after the others had gone. I went to them, and, shaking hands with them, observed that they were strangers to us, and said, "May I ask if you attend any place of worship?" "Yes; we are members of 'Zion,'

and my purpose," said the man, "is to ask if you will preach for us next Wednesday?"

"Do you mean Zion Chapel in — Street?"

"Yes; we are losing our pastor, and we should be glad if you could serve us."

As I walked home I kept repeating, "Strange! Zion of all places! whatever made that man ask me?" Events were happening which largely tended to unsettle me. The term for which I had promised to remain in business was fast running out. I knew I should be asked to renew it, for the business of the department had steadily grown, and more than once I had been congratulated on my success by the head of the firm.

No answer had come from the College. One thing, however, added much to my unsettlement. Rose Chadbourne had left Harley House, and was at home. We had often met, and many pleasant evenings had been spent at her house, where I was a constant visitor. My inward longing to be wholly given up to the ministry grew stronger. The non-movement of the College authorities in reference to my application *seemed* to close the door to my prayer. If I remained in business my way was clear so far, that I could ask Rose to share my lot. If I went to College, I could not ask her, for I knew not what my prospects would be. So the waves of my life seemed agitated by contrary winds. What was I to do?

Remain as you are; you are doing useful work! Yes; but no man can do two things at the same time, and do them both justice. Nonsense! half the young men who go to college had better have kept to their business, and have used their evenings and Sundays in such work as you are doing. So urged my friends! So say some of my readers! They only see the upper half. The stronger impulse, fed by difficulties—not crushed by them—was the under half; a sense that God was calling to complete surrender, in spite of the seemingly overwhelming obstacles. It is that *under* half which men of the world-spirit *never* see. It cannot be weighed and measured by any human standard. It is a fire, the fuel whereof is not found in the mines or forests of earth. Its flames burnt into my very bones, and many waters quenched it not. Through the long hours of night I lay pondering and

praying. Love to God, love to Rose, love for success and financial prosperity, clashed and dashed, and amid the spray I was nearly blinded.

Sunday came and went, and left me still undecided. Monday morning, some half hour after I had arrived, a lad came to me.

"Mr. Lomax wants you in counting house."

"Oh, Mr. Edwards, our agreement ends this month. You will be pleased to know we are very much satisfied with the progress made in your department. You will, of course, be willing to enter into a fresh agreement," and he proceeded to unfold liberal and advancing terms.

For one moment my heart sent up the cry, "Help!"

"Thank you, Sir; I am, as you may be sure, grateful to you for your confidence. May I beg you to favour me, by waiting a month for my decision?"

He raised his eyebrows, and in a sharp, penetrating voice, said, "Mr. Edwards, I like fair dealing. Excuse me, have you any idea of leaving?"

"I will answer you as frankly. Two houses approached me some weeks since; I have refused both. I have nothing of that kind in view. Had it been so I should have told you, for I also detest underhand dealing, Sir."

"I am glad to hear you speak thus. We are not always dealt with as faithfully. I will wait the month, although I cannot see why the matter should not be dealt with at once."

More than ever was I in perplexity. Should I go to the College? No! if God wants me He will send for me. Here was an opening! I should now be in a position to marry. What more needed I? A month! I wish I had said a day.

The time passed, but not my perplexity. Saturday came. A calm, close evening. Not a breath of wind stirred the leaves of the trees as I walked through the "squares" on my way to the northern suburb where Rose Chadbourne lived. I found Mrs. Chadbourne; her daughters would not be at home for an hour or more.

"It is with you I wish to speak."

I told her of my love for Rose, I fully explained my position, prospects, and my desires concerning the ministry. Dear, kind, sad face—I see it now—so true, so gentle.

"She is very dear to me, Mr. Edwards, as are all my children. My widowhood has made me cling to them. Were you not a Christian I could not entrust her to your keeping. If Rose wills, take her, and may God seal your love with His blessing."

We sat and talked until sounds of voices told of the approach of "the girls."

"Rose, will you come for a few minutes walk? I am perplexed, and I should like your help."

"If I can help you, I will."

Need I tell the story? My longings concerning the ministry Rose knew, yet I retold all. I painted the possible drudgery of a village pastorate, the possible struggle with comparative poverty. I told of the prospect in business.

"Now, Rose, which shall it be?"

We had reached that quiet square which nestles behind the busy northern thoroughfare, leading from west to north. The stars were gleaming, but there was nothing else that savoured of the poetical. The roar of the traffic, the incessant stream of passengers, the cries of the costermongers, whose barrows lined the adjacent road, all rose to our ears, and reminded us of the prosaic realities of life. After a minute's quiet she turned her eyes full on mine.

"Have you no answer from God?"

"Sometimes He answers not until the sacrifice is made. My perplexity is to know which is His voice. If I took business prosperity as a sign, then it would appear as if I ought to give up the idea of the ministry. If, on the other hand, I am to take the blessing He has been pleased to grant to my efforts to win men to His feet, then I ought to give up business. You know," I continued, "how I have sought to stifle my desire for the ministry, but I *cannot*. I am conscious I am right in asking your love at this time of perplexity. Although it cannot decide my choice of path, it will decide whether I tread it alone, or with you as a helpmeet. If you do not love me, I must yet wait God's time to open the effectual door for service, or to close it. If you do, it is best that at this juncture you should know the position and possibilities, and with me be prepared for the way He leads."

Again she was quiet. Was I selfish? Was I, after all, mistaken?

"I think I should serve God altogether and entirely, if He called me, and I should count the honour great indeed."

Dear Rose! those words are as full of inspiration to-day as when first they fell on my ears.

"Are you willing to share that future with me, Rose, be it what it may?"

We had re-entered the house, and were sitting alone in the dining-room. Very calmly Rose laid her hand in mine.

"Does that mean 'Yes?'"

Steadily she turned her deep blue eyes to mine.

"I have long loved you. God helping me, I will seek to be a blessing to you."

I drew her to me. We rose, with my arm around her. We looked through the window at the shining stars, and from both our hearts came the prayer, "God bless and guide our lives."

Long miles of road lay open to my memory. Far off I seemed to see a boy wending his tired steps from the busy market of the Strand; then I saw him as a lad fighting down a great temptation beneath the shadow of the Exchange. I saw him again as in a crowded chapel he caught sight of his mother on her knees, watching his baptism. "So He bringeth them unto their desired haven." Truly strangely led.

As I kissed the sweet face, I said:

"Rose, God knoweth our future."

"And He is the guide of those who put their trust in Him," she responded.

Dear Rose! how true a helpmate hast thou been! Truly a good woman is God's gift. . . . I had just written this when my pen was stopped as a hand covered the paper. "I shall know how authors colour their characters—I protest!"

Still the colour is there, Rose says. And this is Rose as I saw her then, and with all the lapse of years, as I see her still.

CHAPTER XVII.

ZION.

Be this the chosen site ;—the virgin sod
Moistured from age to age by dewy eve
Shall disappear—and grateful earth receive
The corner-stone from hands that build to God.

WORDSWORTH.

OUR forefathers loved retirement, and they have left proof thereof in the chapels and churches hidden in snug corners where none can find until they have been initiated into the game of hide and seek.

We must not blame them; we know but little, very little of the difficulties which beset them. The brotherly love of the Church-Episcopal in teaching their adherents that schismatics were worthy of hatred, and that if conventicles must exist, they should do so in some “open” space—as “slaughter-houses or any other nuisance”—may have had much to do with the obscure positions in which some chapels are to be found. Zion Chapel was one of these sweetly sequestered nooks; the site must have been selected upon the principle and design of the “Maze” at Hampton Court. Let me attempt to lead you, dear reader, unto this calm retreat. If you started from Holborn down Gray’s Inn Road to the great terminus of the railways you would *pass* it, but you could not *see* it. Turning round the shops standing at the corner opposite the terminus, and passing up Royal Cross Road, which runs parallel with Gray’s Inn Road as far as the House of Correction, you would *pass* it again, but you would not *see* a sign of it. Supposing, however, you have come nearer to it than this, and you enter a turning running across from Royal Cross Road to Gray’s Inn Road, you would be very very near—“very hot” as the children say in their games—but you could not *see* it then. It is

situate in a small opening at the *back* of the Royal Hospital, and is completely overshadowed, built up all round by houses which stand on higher ground. The road or path upon which it abuts is a private one; and a gate kept persistently closed prevents any vehicular traffic. Having thus succeeded most admirably in shutting the chapel out from public gaze, the friends there made gigantic efforts to get the public in; no wonder they found the task a hard one. Zion was literally "walled around," and stood on chosen and peculiar" ground, the Old Fleet flowing past one corner of it.

The origin, together with the earlier portion of the history of this ancient Church of Christ, is somewhat uncertain; but in 1748 it was a considerable body, and assembled in the Old Meeting House in Boar's Head Yard, Whitechapel. Long before that, a people had met and worshipped God in Spitalfields. They were ministered to by many of the ejected ministers. John Bunyan had "supplied" their pulpit many a time. Its past was a noble protest against ecclesiastical bigotry and priestly intolerance. Following the stream of population, the Church had found its way successively to places of abode nearer the centre of the City, and ultimately the site of which we have spoken had been chosen and the chapel erected. Like most Churches, it had passed through varying fortune.

On the Wednesday evening upon which I had promised to take the service, I entered the building some twenty minutes before the hour for commencing, and as I was seated in the vestry quietly waiting, my former acquaintance, who had invited me to preach, entered, rubbing his hands one over the other with the regularity and constancy of a machine, bidding me not expect many people as the cause had so much declined. Fifteen persons, scattered here and there, formed the congregation. At the close I was urged to spend a Sunday with them, and I agreed for the following Sunday week. *That* day many of our folk from the Mission Hall came; and in the evening, at least, we mustered a respectable audience. It was a change, and I was not sorry to revisit the place. When I stood in the school-room, in the afternoon, it was with strange emotions that I addressed the children, for I spoke from the very platform from which I had received with

meekness the fiery criticisms about the apple in my mouth when I had ventured to recite.

The weeks passed and brought me to the Sunday preceding the Monday on which the answer was to be given to Mr. Lomax. On that Monday morning I found among my letters one written in a stiff, formal hand, which upon reading, I found to contain an unanimous invitation to become the pastor of Zion. The contents of the letter were as business-like and formal as the writing. It stated they were burdened with a debt upon the building of nearly a thousand pounds. The salary they offered was small, but they hoped soon to augment the same, as with the increased congregations, &c., they expected their income would be enlarged. I smiled as I read that portion of the letter, and inwardly remarked, as any business man would, "this is really another way of saying we expect *you* to be the means of getting the money." Right enough; only not always recognised, is it? The letter asked for a "reply by return." I am inclined to think this was one of the business formalities of the writer that had slipped unconsciously from his pen. Any way one would think that accepting a call from a Church depends upon the answer from above, and we cannot command answers to our prayers "by return." There was, however, no time to be lost. As my readers know, I still clung to the hope that some answer would come from the College, but none came. Reader, it was after much prayer—prayer offered on the way to the City that morning, and amid much strife from conflicting emotions that I entered the warehouse. During the morning I sought Mr. Lomax, who greeted me with

"Have you made up your mind, Mr. Edwards?"

"Quite; I intend to leave, sir!"

A sharp glance was shot from those bead-like eyes, "May I ask what has led to your decision?"

"You have a right to know, sir, and I willingly tell you that which has led to my severing the connection with a firm with which I have been so happy."

He interrupted me,

"Are you not satisfied with your salary?"

Business men are not the only men who see everything through the spectacles rimmed with gold.

"Hear me, sir, and you shall judge!" I told him all,

leaving nothing untold ; and when I had finished, he looked at me as if he doubted my sanity, and then ejaculated,

"Well, Edwards, I thought you had *some* sense, you cannot have really looked into this matter."

Mr. Lomax was warden of the parish church in the suburb where he resided, and he had never mixed himself up with the methods and manners of Dissenters ; and that one should give up a position and growing salary for the uncertainties of the Dissenting ministry, was preposterous.

"Have you any likelihood of preferment ?" was his enquiry.

"None ! only as God shall give it me."

"Why, Mr. Edwards, has not God given you this situation as much as any you will obtain in the ministry, as you call it ? But we will not discuss the matter, you are fixed in your resolve, I suppose ?"

"Quite, sir !"

"When do you wish to leave ?" Very sharp and biting were the tones in which this was said.

"My agreement ceases to-morrow ; but if I should be of any service I am willing to stay as long as you need me."

"Oh, we can soon find one to take your place ! However, I will see you again."

"May I ask one more favour. Do not give my reason for leaving until just before I go. I want to save myself the ridicule to which I know I shall otherwise be subject."

"As you please ! Are you ashamed of it ?"

"No, sir—a thousand times no ! only I would rather leave as quietly as may be ;" but his question made my face tingle.

What a conflict raged within me, now that I *had* taken the step—was I acting wisely ? was it *the* right step ?

That same evening Rose strolled with me through a quiet northern suburb. The choice of a home was our object.

"Could we be happy here, think you ?"

"Places make not happiness ; that rests, under God, with ourselves."

"This is three miles at least from Zion Chapel."

"Better so than *too* near."

So our choice of locality, though not then of house, was made.

The days glided on, my successor was appointed, and I was asked to stay on a little while to introduce him to his duties. Then my leaving, and its cause, were made known, and, oh! how senseless my fears. True that some professed not to understand my motive; but on the whole, warm, kind wishes, and many and more substantial tokens of remembrance did I receive, and at last I parted with sincere regret from the scene of my early years of happy toil. I had accepted the call to Zion, and I at once commenced, as will in due course appear.

A bright morning in July—one of those quiet, gentle mornings when the air is bright and the heat not oppressive, a company of some fifteen or twenty are standing on the platform in John Street Chapel. Facing the group is that well-loved figure, now more bent than when we first saw him. In solemn yet sweet tones, he repeats the well-known words of the marriage ceremony. The hand that first grasped mine in loving interest, as I sought the way of God more earnestly, the same hand that led me into the baptismal waters, that same hand is holding Rose's in mine, in firm yet tender grasp; and that same silvery voice is saying: "Forasmuch as Arnold Edwards and Rose Chadbourne have this day consented together in holy wedlock, I pronounce them man and wife in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen." We kneel, and in words never to be forgotten by us, the loved and honoured Baptist Noel commends us to God. In the vestry, when the ceremony is over, that hand takes both ours—Rose's and mine—and once more the well-loved voice is heard: "Never take a step in life without first seeking your Father's guidance. May God richly bless you, my children." Will not that hand be among those which grasp ours in the world of light? Little thought we then that the next time we should see him would be in the Stanmore Home—cold and silent; the years of his earthly life ended, and the joy of the Eternal Presence entered. Yet so it was.

After a long railway journey, we alighted at the quiet sea-bound village by the Naze, where we were met by my aunt, who, notwithstanding my heinous offence of being a Dissenter, overcame her scruples, and set about minister-

ing to our comfort. After partaking of refreshment, and after aunt had gone back to the farm, we strolled along the wide-stretching shore. The waters of the sea were sleeping; but the heaving of its bosom told that it only slept. Calm, solemn ocean! Upon its moving breast the stars glistened, and the radiance from the moon seemed like a sash of silver athwart its waist.

A tug pants and steams as it drags through the sleeping sea a huge three-masted vessel. "Just returned from the Indies," is the reply to our enquiry, "and a rough passage too, by the look of her," and the bronzed seaman passed on.

"How like many a life!" I soliloquise. "A rough passage and a quiet entrance into the harbour."

"Yes," replies Rose. "I was just thinking 'so He bringeth them into *their desired haven!*' Has He not thus led you? You know now that He meant to answer your mother's prayer in His own way. You are in the ministry, Edward?"

"Yes; and STRANGELY LED there," I answer.

Many a time that vessel (showing signs of storm, through which it has passed safely), as it swung at anchor round to the tide, and busy hands furled sail, has risen through the years—a picture of life's voyage.



CHAPTER XVIII.

OLD CLENCH.

The dawn is not distant,
Nor is the night starless,
Love is eternal !
God is still God, and
His faith shall not fail us,
Christ is eternal !—LONGFELLOW.

“WELL, I du declair, that bees Mr. Edwards.”
So was I greeted by a labourer from my uncle’s farm as we stepped from the train to the Ferry at Wye-brow, on our way to the old homestead.

“I’m mort* glad to see yeu.”

“How are you, Clench? This is my wife; we are going to stay a day or two at South Farm.”

“Whyar and awl, I heird yeu wore married, sur? Roight glad to see yeu, marm, righ-et glad,” and he touched his old battered cap that surmounted his weather-beaten face.

Clench was a character; one of those sturdy Essex men, all bone and sinew, who managed to “bring up” a large family on the munificent wages of twelve shillings a week. They had been blessed with twelve children; ten were still living, and all doing well. Two of his boys were sailors, three of his girls were in service; of those at home, some were earning a little at scaring crows and doing odd jobs about the farm, and the rest went to the village school. He was a tall fellow, standing quite six feet in his stockings; he had been at farm work all his life, for no sooner could he halloa, than he was sent to keep the birds away from the seeds. Many a time have I been in his little cottage, and I have never seen it any other than clean and tidy, for he had a good wife.

* “Mort” means right or powerful.

To reach Clinginghoe, we had to cross the arm of the sea, which runs through Wye-brow. Clench had been sent down with the horse and trap, which stood in the yard of the village inn on the other side of the "ferry" awaiting our arrival. Clench had also sundry commissions to fulfil in the shops at Wye-brow, and hence he had crossed the Ferry and was awaiting us on this side. When we were seated in the chaise, I enquired :

"Are they all well at the farm, Clench?"

"E'es, ony Measter Joseph, he doant seem no-how, he doant!"

"Why! is he ill?"

"He be wull enuf in body, but he be moighty quare in soul."

Uncle Joseph was a bachelor who had lived at the farm ever since I could remember. He had been a wayward lad, and he was wayward still.

"He do sweear orful at times."

"Poor old man; sad, is it not, and he knows better, Clench."

"He du; I up and tell him on't at times, but he take no fare o' me, on'y I cannot bare it, it fare makes me quaver!"

"You are still 'holding on,' Clench; finding God faithful?"

"Ay! but do yeu know, I hev been a mort quieter since yeer preached that surman at the chapel? Yeu see I was allus a tryin' and a tryin' fur to du summat but now I ha' larned to sit on t'rock, and it's wonerful how He kivers us up and kips us warm. We bring a mort o' trouble on oursels, we du; we shouldn't addle so many eggs if we would but kip quiet and not get frittin' about."

I knew the old man was in for a talk, and nudging Rose, I waited for his tale.

"Wun day, Measter Edwards, we were fare strought,* t' flour had give out, and the childern had no vittels, and my old womin, she fare give up and couldn't kip the tears in nohow. Wull we set and set and do nuffin, so I says, 'Ria, read a bit.' She know'd what I meant, and she opened that Old Book, and if she didn't read that viry chapter as yeu had read the Sunday as yeu preached at

Lane Meetin-house: 'Thou wilt kip him in purfec peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee.' Them's the wurd; they fare seemed to run through my soul, my mind wouldn't 'stay.' It ran off here and theer loike a ill-trained dorg, and th' more I kip a callin on't the more it kip a runnin. So I doun on ma knees, and I said, 'Lord, let me git a hand on my mind;' but 'twarnt o' no use whatsumnever. My Ria, she say, 'Yeu goes wrong way, I'm thinking,' and she claps her finger right on the lines and reads, 'Thou wilt kip.' 'Yeu see, Clench, HE kips.' So I gets aside on her and kivers my eyes, and thinks. Lor, bless yeu, I was quiet all of a minit, and puts my hand in my old womun's, and I says, 'Peace, perfec peace;' and we set there just a waiting in a great hush. More nor wunce my mind jumped off to th' children and th' empty flour bin, but th' Lord had a hand on't, and it had tu cum back. Maybees we had sat loike that fur nigh an hour. All were in bed but Ria and me, and I heerd footsteps and our garden gate open, and sure enuff sumwun was a comin down the path. The knock at the door fare startled me. A big lad stood there, and he says, 'Be this Clenches?'"

"Yees; what du yeu want?"

"Oi bin a lookin fur yeu this hour or more; Miss Handford, of Wye-brow, at the big house, tewld me to bring this."

"And if he didn't give me a letter wi' moy name on't. I opened it, and Ria were a peppin over my shoulder, and theer warn't a wurd in it on'y a bank note."

"What did you do?" for the old man had stopped to wipe the tear away with his sleeve.

"Why, I knelt down, and takin Ria's hand in mine, after I got over moy choak abit, 'O Lord, kip us stayed on Thee; Thou hast sent us more'n iver we had afore. Du not let us run about; and if iver we du, O pull us back with a sharp chuck as will make us feel we have bin doing wrong.' I've a mort more to tell ye, but here is measter's."

We soon alighted, and were lovingly welcomed. We sat talking beyond farmer's hours that evening, and it was midnight ere we retired to rest.

Dreams seldom visit me, but that evening I did dream:

I was in a large theatre-like building, crowded with people. I had taken my seat opposite the platform, and I

was asking my neighbour what had brought all this people together? "The new minister preaches to-night." With the strange inconsistency of dreams the next minute I was walking on to the platform and giving out the opening hymn myself. The volume of sound I shall never forget. Nor the hush which followed when I led the assembly in prayer.

I awoke, and found myself sitting up, with my hands outstretched. I did not mention my dream, not thinking any more of it indeed.

The days sped on. The usual taunts of joining a sect with no influence, no social standing, no prospect, were ours to bear. I effectually silenced my uncle, however, by saying, "I would far sooner gather, and preach to, a congregation composed of your farm labourers and hard toiling men and women than be the minister of the wealthiest congregation your bishop ever speaks to."

There was no longer any doubt that I was fast drifting into madness, or exhibiting very "low tastes."

One afternoon, a clatter of horses' hoofs, rumbling of wheels, and barking of dogs, betokened some visitors. Two healthy-looking farmers from the neighbouring village of Hardley had come to seek my help. "Would I preach for them in the Methodist Chapel next Sunday?" How they knew I was there, puzzled me; but there is little need even for the telegraph for local news in villages.

Another glorious Sabbath morning, and as we drove through lanes and along country roads, amid the scented air and profound quiet, my thoughts naturally turned upon the work of my life, unto which I had now put my hands. We arrived, after asking the way several times, and having seen to the comfort and safety of the horse, we found our hosts, and with them walked to the chapel, a plain brick building with an immense portico, standing back from the main road, between which and the chapel the graveyard intervened. The windows were all wide open, letting in the sweet breeze which came across flower-laden gardens. Little groups assembled at the doors, talking over the events of the week. We found our way into the chapel, and in passing the pulpit noticed it was like an exaggerated wine glass, its stem rising from a large square space, where already some twenty men and youths were assembled, and were tuning their various instru-

ments—flutes, trombones, large and small violins, and a strange walking-stick kind of instrument with a brass tube for mouth-piece.

By the time I announced the hymn,

“O Love Divine, how sweet Thou art,”

the chapel was nearly filled, and what a congregation! Old dames, in bonnets that all but hid their faces; young maidens, in all the newness of anniversary dress; men with tanned faces which seemed to make grey hairs whiter, and to blacken raven locks. Never shall I forget the moment following the announcement of the hymn. A man arose, facing the musicians, gave a note from his flute, and then beat time with it all the rest of the hymn. The tune sung was “Praise,” and if my readers have never heard this tune sung by a village choir, they can form but little idea of the force of which music is capable.

Over, over, over again did they sing the last verse, the congregation joining lustily, and verily they “made a cheerful noise,” and I believe “to the God of their salvation.” This part of the exercise over (and exercise it was, if the use of coloured handkerchiefs by the performers to absorb the perspiration was any evidence,) I proceeded. During the reading sundry comments were made, something like this: “True”—“Bless Him”—“I know it”—“To be sure”—“Just like Him.” At first I thought I had made some mistake, but soon gathered it was a real and honest expression of enjoyment at the words I read.

During the next hymn groups of farmers, with their wives and families, came trooping in, and the chapel was thronged; the pulpit stairs affording accommodation for some. My text was:

“And Eli sat upon a seat by the wayside, watching, for his heart trembled for the ark of God.”

I proceeded with my sermon, with which I trouble you not, kind reader, but I had not proceeded far before I was literally nearly startled out of the pulpit. A man who had seated himself on the top of the pulpit stairs, and consequently right against the door, shouted, “Hallelujah” in such tremendously stentorian tones that I jumped at what was little short of an explosion. I know not how I

recovered my self-possession, but I know that my whole being shook. Waxing warm with my theme, the amens and hallelujahs increased, and I actually began to enjoy them. They were so evidently the sincere, if singular, expressions of heart-felt praise to God. As I came in my sermon to dwell upon the eternal security of the Church of Christ, quite another mood came over the people. A soft silence reigned. Aged men leaned forward, one hand behind their ear. The women, whose age sat lightly on them, now and again half rose from their seats. Tears flowed freely. Deep sighs, as of repressed emotion, were heard here and there; and when I closed, a low murmur of amens followed. The hymn, "All hail the power of Jesu's name," closed the morning service; and once more did praise come forth unto God upon the instruments and from the congregation.

The afternoon saw us holding open-air service on the village green; and the evening was a repetition of the morning, save that the atmosphere was more vitiated by the over-crowding. Amid much hand-shaking we parted from our friends. Driving home, we passed small companies, some as far as three miles from the chapel, showing the distance many had walked to the services.

Oh, those plain unadorned country conventicles! what hallowed memories they enshrine; through them is shed abroad a light akin to that which blazed in the tabernacle in the wilderness. They are nurseries of civil and religious liberty—homes of truth—often the only protest against surrounding and developing bigotry and Romanism. What noble men have spoken in those country pulpits! Men who, after toiling all the six days of the week, have found it a joy to walk many miles to "work for Jesus." It is the fashion in some quarters, to sneer at the "local preacher" as he is called; but had it not been, nay, may I not say, were it not for these lowly heroes, the Gospel would not be heard in many a village.

Tired, but glad at heart, we reached home, just before the darkness of night gathered. The next morning we bade good-bye to all at the farm, and Clench once more drove us to the ferry. I wondered why he should come, knowing that he could ill be spared in the morning hours, and that a boy from the farm would have served to drive the horse back.

I was not left long wondering.

"A fine survis that, yesterday?"

"Who told you?" I asked, wondering how he knew thus early.

Why, I wus theer, leastways in the mornin'."

Nonsense, Clench."

It bean't."

"Why, man, it's nine miles if it's an inch; but perhaps you rode?"

"Not I. Shank's pony is all I rode; I coom home to let t'old womin go in t'evenin'; but, Measter Edwards, what du it mean: "'Allowed be Thy Name?"

After I had caught his meaning, and explained to him, he said:

"I see, yeu drawer a kind o' ring roun' it, and niver let a unclean bird come over that fence. Jist as my Ria's name is more nor all others to me. So," and he lifted his hands towards the sky, "ony iver so much higher be His name."

We had reached the ferry, and as we shot out from the shore, I shouted: "Good-bye, Clench! God bless you!"

"Aye, aye, perfec peace; He kips us, and not we kip ourselves."

Rich old Clench! ten children and twelve shillings a week, but more to be envied than many who look with disdain on the untutored agriculturalists. Truly God entrusteth His secrets to babes. Rich old Clench! many a time when my heart has been hot and restless, I have thought of thy calm confidence, and the very thought has made me feel for the Rock, and nestle beneath the shelter, where alone is perfect peace. Dear old Clench! Such rich fruit from village Churches should make those who live in towns determine that never shall the day dawn when these so-called conventicles shall be closed. Those chapels are sacred spots, whence only the waters of truth flow in many a place. Who could imagine "Clench," bought over by soup, coal, and blankets. Nay, as he said once to me:

"I can't du wi' mummary no how; if God lets me see His light, I aint a goin' to let no mun darkin' it."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE WORKSHOP AND THE WORK.

Strew silently the fruitful seed
As softly o'er the tilth ye tread ;
For hands that delicately knead
The consecrated bread—
The mystic loaf that crowns the board
When, round the table of their Lord
Within a thousand temples set,
In memory of the bitter death
Of Him who taught at Nazareth
His followers are met.—BRYANT.

WE soon returned to the great, awful city, with its strange commingling of nationalities ; that city in which all nations gather, meeting in mart and market, and yet as distinct and separate as the Channel Islands. London, which London ? There is the London of the Jew in which the ancient people live and labour. The West and West Central where the Italians live, away in Saffron Hill and Hatton Garden district. The German London, in the far East. The French London up West, whose people cross each other's path, all speaking English, in which language their commerce is transacted, and when the day's work is over, all going to their own quarter as separate as if they had never met and mingled in wonderful London.

The acceptance of the pastorate of Zion had led me to review the steps of my life.

It was from the farm just left that I had come a boy to the great city, into business life, and now again from the same farm I come to the same great city to begin a new life indeed.

Before we had been many weeks at Zion, I found how great was the demand made upon time and thought, by the Nonconformist practice of three fresh sermons every

week. My resolve to work and to offer to my people only that which had passed through the mill of prayer and study, and my desire to fulfil the two maxims I had made my own, namely, "Beaten oil for the temple lamp." "God helps them that help themselves," kept me diligent, if not successfully studious. I felt that unless I worked I could not expect God to bless me, and the very position and surroundings of Zion made toil a necessity. Its geographical whereabouts my reader has already heard. Next door to nowhere, unless it be to other chapels and churches. Without venturing upon his patience too much, I would like him to have a bird's-eye view of the surroundings of this "Hill of Zion,"—which was decidedly a valley.

We will take the outer edge of the circle first, placing Zion as the centre. Fifteen minutes slow walking towards the city brought us to the new and magnificent temple just reared for the ministry of one who stood (and who stands to-day) high in popular esteem, a minister, rich in thought and racy in utterance. His chapel was a centre of attraction. Still on the outer circle, the same distance towards the west, was a church of our own denomination, where one equally popular had gathered and sustained a flourishing Church. Coming nearer and more towards the north, stood the cathedral of Presbyterianism. A little more towards the east in this inner circle was John Street Chapel, which was redolent with hallowed memories; two more Baptist churches, and one Congregational, completed this circle; and closer still were three more Dissenting places of worship. One, a Baptist chapel, where met (until an unfortunate dispute) the people who built Zion. Under the ministry of a loving-hearted man that cause was enjoying great prosperity, and the chapel had but recently been much enlarged. Ten Dissenting places besides the Episcopal churches, and the most of them were vigorous and advancing!

"No business to be so many," observes a critic. True, but as we did not erect them we could not pull them down, and the population was large enough for ten more: the only thing left was to work.

It is such spheres, however, that throw thoughtful men upon the one great question: How to get the people? Not how to get on, but how can the people be won?

These out-of-the-way places require out-of-the-way means. Only those who know the difficulties can understand the temptation. Fortunately my die was cast. I had determined to preach the Gospel as fully and as simply as I knew how. To me the Gospel was summed up in the apostle's words: "How that Christ died for our sins . . . was buried . . . rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." Mere repetition of well-turned phrases, the constant iteration of the magic word, "believe," without a full statement of its meaning, I felt to be the offering of shells minus the kernel. A crucified Saviour, presented like a Romish crucifix to kiss, is as far from the unfolding of His life as the Church of Rome is from the apostolic doctrine.

Such were my resolves as I one day stood in that empty chapel, and as I looked around upon the dirty walls and worn seats (for the paint had come off, and in many places dirt remained) the lofty ceiling, (for it was built in the hope that some day galleries would be needed), the desolate condition of the whole, and the heavy burden of mortgage, made me wonder if my choice did not reveal my folly. At such times nothing will enable one to entertain a hope of success, but the conscious rest of the soul in God.

I knew that unless the people outside could in some way be made to know of the Gospel preached within, I could not expect success. So out-door services, and plenty of them, were among the agencies used.

Zion had then two deacons, or two nominally, for one lived at Brixton, and although for a little time he came over every Sunday he did no more, and as soon as the congregation began to improve in numbers he gracefully retired, telling us that now he had seen the Church settled, he thought he could be spared.

The other deacon was the one my reader knows already, he who first asked me to preach at Zion. At this time he was a little over fifty years of age, his short, crisp hair freely sprinkled with grey. Cold steely eyes, rounded head, florid complexion, and that habit we have already marked of rubbing some invisible dust from his hands while speaking. Yes, there he stands as clearly before me now as when I first knew him. He must have loved the "very dust of Zion," and truly there was plenty there

to love. He was one of those who came away at the time of the dispute already mentioned, and he was deacon, treasurer, secretary, school superintendent, all in one. Many a time, as he told me, he has been the only male member at the weekly (I had almost written "weakly") meeting for prayer. Dionysius Rasper was a hard man, and what he would have been but for the influence of his gentle wife one dare not guess. I do not think he *meant* to be hard. He was of that suspicious temperament which never trusts if it can avoid it, a fact undoubtedly arising largely from his lack of education, and too early an acquaintance with the world's maxims. He did his work well, never had Zion a better servant, but how much more happily would all have gone if Dionysius Rasper could have been able to spell out the meaning of one word—Kindness. He was the one officer of the Church besides the new pastor.

After having held the usual service one week night, I said on my way home, "Rose, do you think we can manage with one deacon?"

"One of the kind you have now would be enough."

"True, little woman, and we know not where to get another."

"Wait till they come, Arnold; if God blesses your ministry, you will find men when you need them."

"You have not taken to Mr. Rasper?"

"He is fond of the 'upper seats,' and is so cold. I wonder sometimes if he ever needs a fire."

"Well, we must remember he has had all the work to do, and thus naturally takes the first place."

"Yes, and he will keep it too, I think."

"Still, we may not have to wait long, for the congregation is increasing, and many are coming forward to join the Church."

"It is a wonder they come to such a dirty place! could it not be cleaned?"

Among my friends at John Street Chapel was one whom I have omitted to notice. A retired sea captain, a bachelor, who was interested in a large ship-owning firm in the City. He was (when I was a member at John Street) one of the "elders," and having much time upon his hands was able to visit the weary and the poor. Many a time in the old days he had put his arm in mine and led me

towards his house, stimulating me to earnest working in the cause of Christ. Standing over six feet in height, of broad commanding figure, Captain Macdonald was a splendid specimen of a Scotchman, both in physique and orthodoxy. Tender as a child towards all in distress, and especially towards widows and orphans. For he had been left an orphan, and "the only son of his mother, and she was a widow."

I had not seen him for some time, and was very much surprised one Sunday morning as I mounted the steps of Zion, to find his hand grasping mine, and to hear him say, "I have found you out, why did you not tell me of your settlement here?"

"Why, Captain" (we always spoke thus to him), "it does one good to see you, are you going to be one of our hearers this morning?"

"I have come to settle down with you, if you preach as well as I am told," he laughed; then a softness crept into his voice as he almost whispered in my ear, "Keep near the cross! God bless you."

From that morning I never missed Captain Macdonald from his seat, except in case of illness. Why he came to us I never knew. I asked him once, and in his brusque way he said, "I was told."

One of the institutions of Nonconformity is the "recognition," or as in some denominations, "the ordination service." In the denomination to which I belong, the service is a simple recognition by the neighbouring ministers of the newly-settled pastor, and it affords a healthy opportunity for wise counsel and fraternal greetings among minister and members. When the pastor is fresh in the ministry, that is, when he settles over his first charge, it is customary for questions to be asked him publicly before his people, concerning his faith and his reasons for accepting the call of the Church over which he has come to be pastor. Which questions he is required to answer.

The day came for this service. The president of the London Association presided. He asked me the usual questions, and called upon me to "state to this people my reasons for accepting their call." The chapel was crowded, although it was a week-day afternoon. Though much has been said against, and much for, these recognition charges, I can say it was to me a means of good. I

hope my answers were satisfactory, they were at any rate sincere.

The reader must allow me to pass unnoticed the happy months that followed. The congregation more than filled the chapel, the Church went up in its membership steadily, and liabilities decreased. The favour of the Lord was upon us.

Thus passed some eighteen months, when a cry went up from the people, "Give us room." A committee was formed, and plans accepted for galleries and new school-rooms and enlargement. By the wearing task of gathering the money and making the final decisions, we will pass; but the question *where* to meet while alterations were in force, led me to think once again how strangely God had led me.

For the morning meetings we decided to apply to the deacons at John Street Chapel for the use of their school-room. This was readily granted, and with mingled feelings I opened the service one Sunday morning in the very room which I had entered a careless youth, and listened to dear John Robarts. Oh, if *he* could but have seen me! Stay, did he not? He had passed away to his better home; but are not our loved ones cognisant of us? As I sat in that room (for we held our week evening services there also) alone, awaiting the hour to open the doors, what memories came! I sat on the same old stool, from which *he* had spoken words which illumined my eyes to the wonders of Divine truth. My Bible lay on the same desk, and I was permitted to preach the same old Gospel in that very room.

There had I wept hot tears over my waywardness and weakness. There had *his* dear wife held me in close helpful converse long after the others had gone. There had I eaten of the fruit of the Word, and drunk of the water of life. There, too, a few of us had met on Sundays for prayer after the service in John Street Chapel, and in that same room it was my privilege to speak to anxious souls and lead them to Jesus, as once I stayed and walked with Mr. Robarts.

No consecrating water had ever touched that soil from priestly hands, but the tears of the penitent had fallen. No choral service of consecrating import had ever risen within those walls, but the song of praise from the for-

given had rung out clear and true. Oh, when will our thoughtful young men and women learn to see the sham in the one and the deep truth within the other.

I stood in that room a few days since, and once again lifted my heart in prayer and praise, and sung the sweet hymn :

When all Thy mercies, O my God,
My rising soul surveys,
Transported with the sight I'm lost
In wonder, love, and praise.



CHAPTER XX.

MY DREAM FULFILLED.

Keep pushing, 'tis wiser
Than sitting aside,
And dreaming and sighing
And waiting the tide.
In life's earnest battles they only prevail,
Who daily march onward and never say fail.

IN the centre of High Street, Islington, stands the Agricultural Hall, a building of immense capacity for accommodating audiences, and lending itself with chameleon-like charm to any and every colour of political or theological creeds, cattle and horse shows, dairy shows, large bazaar entertainments, and religious services.

Scarcely had the crowd dispersed which had lately gathered there to witness a display of muscular power and endurance through the medium of "wheels" ridden by cyclists, either night or day, or both, than the "track" was removed, and preparations made for the "crowds" to be drawn by two American evangelists, who had come thither. Every means that human ingenuity could devise, every effort that loving hearts could prompt, were put in motion to prepare the way. Committee of monied laymen. Committee of all sections of unmonied ministers. Conforming or non-conforming committees of ladies from all the Churches, and sub-committees of various designations, to whom some special department of the work was assigned.

All was done that could be done to ensure success from a human point of view. In these committees I bore my part, and gladly co-operated in the good work. The services of Messrs. Moody and Sankey are so well known that the mere mention of the names is sufficient, and we introduce these services only as they are connected with our story. In passing we note that the one weak place was

that known as the "Inquiry-room." Afterwards, and in other and following gatherings this mistake was rectified. In all large or small evangelistic gatherings *this* is the one place where special care is needful. I have seen young ritualistic curates, "sisters of mercy" (at least, I judged so by their dress) "brethren" of a certain order, directing the mind of the inquirers. It is difficult to keep "isms" or their exponents from such work if they seek it, but none the less, weakness here may mean failure everywhere.

Just as these services at the Agricultural Hall commenced, "Zion" was delivered over to the tender mercies of the builders. The fact that I had been for some time engaged in conducting services on Sunday afternoons in "theatres," and taking my share in the preparatory work of this evangelistic movement, may have contributed largely to my decision to hold the services on Sunday evenings in some central and popular place if we could obtain it.

The first mention of such an idea literally frightened some of our people, and it was only the firmness of my determination not to hold the evening service in any small place that eventually gained their reluctant consent, and even then all the financial arrangements were thrown upon me. With earnest prayer to God for guidance I went forth to search. No place could be found nearer to Zion than a theatre in High Street, Islington, opposite the Agricultural Hall, although some three minutes walk nearer the city. I made the arrangement, and when I disclosed to the people the vicinity of the theatre, I was met with a chorus of such helpful words as these: "Why, you cannot expect to get any people. The services at the 'Hall' will make it impossible. Too near; a bad spot. It will surely end in failure."

Now by one of those strange contradictions, so apparent to those who are at all observant, the one man who, not only did not oppose, but approved, was Mr. Dionysius Rasper. Steadily and faithfully, all through that trying time, did he second my efforts, and at no period of my association with him did I more learn to respect him than this. Cold and methodical, almost mechanical, he was still. Never a loving, warm word did he speak, yet he was always to be relied upon, and was never absent from his post of duty.

The first evening service was looked forward to with much anxiety, and with mingled faith and fear; for no man knows what *strong faith* is until he has known *fear*. Does not fear induce faith? That evening came at last. Rose and I set forth. Would there be many people? Would God bless our new departure? As we turned from the Holloway Road into Liverpool Road we came upon crowds hurrying to the service at the Agricultural Hall. We passed the surging mass at the doors of that hall, and coming up to *the* theatre, found some of our brethren holding an open-air service at its very doors.

I walked up and down the green-room, which served as a vestry, trying to calm my agitated spirit. In prayer I wrestled with God. I was interrupted by the entrance of Dionysius Rasper. Rubbing his hands, his face covered with a cold smile, "I thought you would like to know, pastor, the place is full already, and it wants five minutes to the time." I caught his hand, and said, "Let us have a minute in prayer," and methodically he laid the hymn sheet he held in his hand, as a carpet for his knees, and prayed. By the tremor of his voice I knew *he felt* more than he *could* show. We entered the "stage" together, and before me, around me, filling box, pit, galleries, was a mass of human beings. At the close we were engaged in converse with the anxious until long past ten o'clock.

"Rose," said I, when we were once more comfortably seated in our home, "this is wonderful; do you think it will continue?"

"He who sent the people to-night, knows how to repeat His mercy."

"True, yet some allowance may be made for the novelty of the thing as to our own people."

"Is it 'novel' for God to answer prayer?" She saw I was hurt.

"Forgive me, Arnold; but we had so many prayer-meetings that your words seem like doubting Him."

When next our people met, congratulations poured in, and many who opposed at first, declared "It was quite the right thing to do."

In the three months we spent at that theatre we saw many wonderful works of God. The green-room which served as a waiting-room for the actors and actresses during the week, was our inquiry-room on Sundays, and

many were the histories of waywardness and sin that were told there.

Nor is this to be wondered at, for the theatre stood in a centre of profligacy and vice, and not a few who spent every evening in the week there, came in also on the Sunday. Oh, the scenes that were enacted in that green-room!

Weeping in her repentance, like another Magdalene at the Saviour's feet, is a beautiful girl of some nineteen years.

"Will your mother receive you if I take you to her?"

With a tearful smile lighting her eye: "Yes, oh, yes, mother would not refuse."

"Will you go?"

"I will; but my heart is sore!"

Presently, a friend with us, we are rattling in a cab, out towards the South of London, and after a short time we stop.

"Will you stay in the cab, until we ascertain if your mother is alive and well?"

"Yes," her face buried in her hands.

Shall we trust her, or shall we leave one to stay with her lest the dread of meeting the mother she has wronged drive her away after all? We will trust her. There is nothing the human heart responds to so soon as trust.

We wend our way up the steps, ring, are admitted. The mother is alone. Some common phrases pass.

"Have you a daughter named ——." She starts from her seat.

"Do you know her? Have you seen her?"

There is a hungry look in her weary eyes, and she convulsively presses her hands to her side. She does not resume her seat, but stands swaying to and fro in her anxiety.

"Would you like to see her? and would you forgive her if she asked you?"

She changes all in a moment, and in a calm but hoarse voice, says:

"Night and day I've prayed for her. Poor lassie, her sin has not made her less my child. Where is she?"

With the last question the calmness breaks, and again she is swaying backwards and forwards in her agony.

"Stay quietly here, and in two minutes expect to see

your daughter!" She is on her knees. "O God, at last. . . ." This is all we hear as we hurry to the cab.

Slowly the weeping, agitated girl leaves the vehicle, ascends the steps, passes along the passage, and ere we reach it the door is flung open, and all we see is the two women locked in each other's arms, sobbing violently.

"Come," said I to my friend, "this is no place for strangers; leave them. The lost one is found!"

One evening a whole family, who had just come to London from Liverpool, where they had landed from the Bahama Islands, enter, attracted by the notice outside. They are four in number. *Two* that evening are converted, subsequently the whole four are received as members.

Another Sunday, the subject of the sermon had been: "The great wages question." "The wages of sin is death."

Some words such as these were uttered: "You may choose the mint in which the coin is fashioned,—Drink, lust, malice, covetousness, but the payment is sure. Young man, even now you are bearing about you in your troubled, weary heart, memories hideous and oppressive — 'the wages of sin.' Actual death has been very near. Maybe only twelve months have passed since you placed your hand on the cold forehead of your dead father, and vowed to live a better life. Yet you are here to-night, every vow broken, and remorse gnawing like a worm."

When I entered the green-room at the close, it was filled with seekers after Christ, seated on the various settees; but pacing up and down with sharp, nervous tread, now and then clasping his hands, and anon flinging them apart as if he would dash something from him, was a young man of some six and twenty years. Crisp, curly, black hair surmounted a narrow forehead. Fire shot from his deep brown eyes, as facing me, he said:

"Who has told you about me? Has my wife been to you?"

"I do not know you, nor your name."

"Some one *has* told you about me?"

"Tell me your name? You and your doings are certainly quite strange to me. What interest would it be to me to listen to tales about you?"

"I do not know; but some one has told you!"

I saw he was greatly agitated; every now and then he would resume his walk up and down the room, then he would look at me with anger flashing from his whole face. I thought it best to leave him to himself, and I turned to speak with others who were waiting.

The green-room was a strange place for such a scene. Mirrors extending from floor to ceiling, flashed from its walls. Luxurious couches and settees were now occupied by anxious and weeping men and women. On the carpeted floor some were kneeling, listening to the prayer offered on their behalf. When most had departed, this young man seated himself beside me.

"Twelve months ago yesterday I stood by my father's coffin, and placing my hand on his brow, I vowed to serve the God he loved. I tried, I failed, I am a dissolute gambler! My wife has left me, and small wonder, for I treated her like a brute. Some strange feeling came over me, and passing here this evening I strolled in; and do you remember what you said in your sermon? Do you mean to say my wife has not told you? How else could you know? for only my wife knew of my vow."

Putting my hand on his knee. "Listen! No human creature has told me. It may be that the God who heard your vow, led me to utter the words you heard, and it is time you sought His forgiveness."

Ere we parted he had knelt with me in prayer, and promised to see me at the week-evening service. Night after night I saw that man, and in the old schoolroom, where I had sat Sunday after Sunday as a youth, he yielded to the entreaty of the Lord. He was one of the trophies of the theatre service.

These are some of the results, enough to show how wonderfully God blessed the movement. Among the many agencies for reaching the masses, the services at the theatres occupy a prominent place. The committee, of which the noble late Earl Shaftesbury was president, and of which Mr. Sawell is the able secretary, has done, and is doing, a valuable work. Hiring for the autumn and winter different theatres, people are gathered together who never think of entering either churches or chapels. In connection with this committee I lectured on Sunday afternoons at different theatres, and thus

traversed a wider circle than would have been possible, but for the enforced absence from Zion.

Indirectly these services were of great benefit to us as a Church. They afforded opportunity for work to many, and enlarged their ideas concerning the need of the people, and the length and breadth of the field wherein to sow the seed. Their activities were quickened, their faith enlarged, and I trust their brotherly love considerably widened.



CHAPTER XXI.

"GATHERING OF THE CLANS."

Heaven doth with us as we with torches do,
Nor light them for ourselves ; for if our virtues
Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike
As if we had them not.—SHAKESPEARE.

IN that vast area, the south-east of the metropolis, there stands, in one of the main roads, a little way back from the broad pavement, a massive stone building, known as the Walworth Road Chapel. It is Tuesday ; and throngs of men, wearing soft felt hats and black suits, are finding their way thither ; some are pale and almost sickly looking, some are tanned by much exposure to the sun ; they are all ages, all sizes, but all have an eager look as if on some great thing intent. It is scarcely ten o'clock. What can be the reason of this unusual commotion ? The crowds that wend their way every morning to the City—that centre of all activities—have long since reached their destination. This crowd, numbering some five hundred men, is not bent towards the City. The attraction, be it what it may, is evidently within that massive stone chapel.

Some weeks prior to this gathering Rose was sitting busily stitching, and having finished my toil in the study I was reading aloud to her. Laying down the book I said, "It is strange my application to College was never answered, is it not ?"

"Not to me, Arnold. You neither went, nor wrote, nor troubled yourself about it after you entered into the agreement to stay on in business ; and if I were one of the authorities I should like men to show they were in earnest."

"You think I was not in earnest then?"

"Far from it. I *know* you were, yet for all that you did not evince it by following up your application. To quote your own words last Sunday, you did not '*keep knocking*.' You knocked and kept away."

"Well, I have been in earnest this time, for I have written to the President, begging him to allow me to be present at the coming conference, when I mean to ask him to let me enter College after all."

"How can you attend to College duties and do your own work too?"

"Where there's a will there's a way."

"Too much work means a breakdown, or some of it not thoroughly done."

In a day or two the answer to my letter came. I told my dear friend and deacon, Captain Macdonald, and he said, "Carry this as a donation to the funds of the Institution," and he placed a ten pound note in my hand. Thus it came to pass that I was one of the men with the soft felt hat that formed the crowd that morning in Walworth Road. Having ascertained that the President had arrived, I made my way to the back of the chapel.

"Ah! Edwards, glad to have you with us!"

I was conscious of that curious feeling taking possession of me of which I have previously spoken—a kind of awe, veneration, and diffidence—and stammered out something about the kindness and privilege I felt it to be, and then gave in Captain Macdonald's donation.

"Would you not like to come into the College?"

"Would I?" I could have knelt at his feet! "Would I?" Had I not longed and prayed for this, and waited many an anxious year? "Would I?" Could those simple words be true? Collecting my almost scattered senses, I said:

"I applied once, sir."

"Surely not; you are mistaken."

It was the opening I had long waited for. I then told him my anxiety, my fear, my unquenched desire. What a marvellous combination of shrewd sense and kindness that President is! Having mentioned that I came from Dowchester, he said,

"Was that your father's shop at the corner of Head Street? Why, I passed that many a time when I was

a boy, and wondered how the green ginger wine was made, of which I saw a notice in the window. How is your father? Is he alive yet?" and he went on talking to me as if he had known me for years. He did not patronise nor assume any air of superiority, but talked like the great, good, beautiful man he is, and my young heart went out in strong love to him.

"Well, Edwards," he concluded, "you will have to work, and what with Zion and College your hands will be full. I have heard of your success at Zion and rejoice therein. Preach the Gospel; keep near the cross, and God will bless you. See Professor Young, and tell him what I have said. Mind you work. We have no room for drones."

When I left him I did not know whether I was on my head or my heels. Going to College at last! Verily I had been strangely led. All my prayers answered. My long anxiety for ever allayed!

Some of my friends, when they heard the news, said, "What need have you to go to College? You have been called by God into the ministry without any college course, and He has blessed your labours." One said it was "flying in the face of Providence." I have heard people speak like this since then. Ay, some have derided a college course, and gloried that God could call men into the ministry, God-made ministers, not man-made. I am not careful to answer them; only, reader, let me say, that College did for me what I am persuaded nothing else could have done. I never knew my littleness, ignorance, and faults until I had been there. I never knew the large-hearted sympathy and brotherly love of men engaged in the same great work. I never had such a view of the widely varying talent possessed by men whom God calls to His service; and, until then, much as I had heard, I never knew how the one man who presided over the College, moulded, shaped and invigorated the lives thus committed to his care. My ideas of sermon-matter, not sermon-making, underwent considerable alteration. There is a mind and heart drill which is essentially valuable, a power in associating with like-minded yet very different men. As one expressed it, "We lose our feathers and discover our nakedness," and this is something, as only those know who experience it. If any man think he

hath whereof to glory, let him go to this College, and assuredly he will find cause to exclaim, "Things are not what they seem."

As I entered the chapel after my conversation with the President, several of the ministers who knew me gave me a hearty welcome; and seated with them my experience of College Conference began.

Amid a perfect tumult of applause, which made the old chapel, solid as it was, tremble, the President rose to give his annual address. For a minute or two he could not speak. Clapping of hands, stamping of feet, continued shouts, and all kinds of demonstrations of welcome at last came to an end; and then, out came pocket-books, slips of paper, and the men settled to listen, to mark, learn, and inwardly digest. Before the President lay the open Bible; upon its leaves he placed a half sheet of note paper. Brushing his hair from his expansive brow, he began his address in quiet and easy tone.

"Now that the time has come for me to address you, my beloved brethren, may God Himself speak through me to you.

"The subject which I have selected for this address is FAITH. As believers in Jesus we are all of us of the pedigree of faith. . . . We, brethren, are children of the promise, born not after the flesh, nor according to the energy of nature, but by the power of God. We trace our new birth not to blood, nor the will of the flesh, nor the will of man, but to God alone. . . . We are altogether saved by faith. The brightest day which dawned upon us was the day in which we first 'looked unto Him, and were enlightened.' It was all dark till faith beheld the Sun of Righteousness. . . . Now, brethren, as our pedigree is of faith, and our claim to the privilege of the covenant is of faith, and our life in its beginning, and continuance, is all of faith, so may I boldly say our ministry is of faith too. We are heralds to sons of men, not of the land of Sinai, but of the love of Calvary. We preach not man's merit, but Christ crucified. . . . Interwoven, therefore, with our entire spiritual life, and with all our ministerial work, is the doctrine and grace of faith. . . . We, above all men, need the mountain-moving faith, which, in the old time, obtained promises, stopped the mouth of lions, subdued kingdoms, and

wrought righteousness. We have faith in God. We know the Lord as a distinct personal existence, a real God, infinitely more real than the things which we have seen and handled, more real even than ourselves, for we are but shadows. *He* alone is the I AM, abiding the same for ever and ever. We believe in a God of purposes and plans, who has not left a blind fate to tyrannise over the world, much less an aimless chance to rock it to and fro.

“We believe in a present God wherever we may be, and a working and operating God accomplishing His own purposes steadfastly and surely in all matters and places, and at all times; working out His designs as much in what seemeth evil as in that which is manifestly good; in all things driving on His eternal chariot to the goal which infinite wisdom has chosen, never slackening His pace nor drawing the rein, but for ever, according to the eternal strength that is in Him, speeding forward without pause. . . . Our faith in Jesus is most real. We believe in those dear wounds as we believe in nothing else; there is no fact so sure to us as that He was slain, and has redeemed us to God by His blood. . . . We have received the certainties of revealed truth. We do not bow down before men’s theories of truth, nor do we admit that theology consists in ‘views’ and ‘opinions.’ We declare that there are certain verities, essential, abiding, eternal, from which it is ruinous to swerve. I have been charged with being a mere echo of the Puritans, but I had rather be the echo of truth than the voice of falsehood. . . . We believe in the prevalence of supplication. Prayer, to us at any rate, is no vain thing. We do not bow the knee merely because it is a duty, a commendable spiritual exercise, but because we believe that into the ear of the eternal God we speak our wants, and that His ear is linked with a heart feeling for us, and a hand working on our behalf.

“My brethren, when you hear that a learned man has made a new discovery which contradicts the Scriptures, do not feel alarmed. . . . We know that our faith is well founded. We speak not with bated breath. . . . We will speak what God has revealed to us. . . . Well, you and I are committed to the onward course; we cannot go back, neither can we turn to the right hand nor to the left. What shall we do, brethren? Shall we lie down and fret?

Shall we stand still and be dismayed? No! In the name of the Lord let us set up our banner again, the royal standard of Jesus crucified. Let us sound the trumpet joyously, and let us march on, not with the trembling footsteps of those who know that they are bent upon an enterprise of evil, but with the gallant bearing of men whose cause is divine, whose warfare is a crusade. Courage, my brethren, behold the angels of God fly in our front, and lo the eternal God leads our van! 'The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Therefore will we not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.' Blessed faith! God grant us more of it, for Christ's sake."

Such are a few of the best-remembered sentences, but I cannot reproduce the gesture, countenance, fire and pulse of the message and the man; the deep and tender pathos with which he pleaded with us to be true; the fine frenzy of eloquence with which he spoke of the joy of serving God. The whole audience was moved now to tears and to a determination of purpose, which found expression in the strong-voiced "amens" which ever and anon burst forth. Who can depict the attitude of men whose souls are listening as for their very life. I had heard that same man every Thursday for over twelve months, had seen the much larger congregation which gathers then, swayed and moved under his words of power, but here the preacher was another man. Grandly, chastely eloquent, yet not in his eloquence lay his power. Something of it lay in the audience, something in the occasion, something in the deep sense of responsibility which pervaded the speaker. All I know is, that the fire then created in my bosom has burned on ever since, and even as I write I am once more hearing the voice, and gazing at the man to whom, under God, I owe so much. Many a conference address have I heard since then, but somehow I go back to this one, and breathe a prayer of gratitude to God.

We poured out of the chapel. Some gathered in the great Tabernacle rooms where dinner had been provided. I went home, my heart full to overflowing. As I entered I flung my arms around my wife, exclaiming, "Rose, I am going to College, thank God!"

"All things come to those who wait," said Rose, quoting a verse of her favourite poet.

That night I rehearsed in prayer before God the strange way He had led me, and wondered why He did not let me go to College before and there use the opportunities afforded, when I was free from the care of a Church, and wondering—fell asleep.



CHAPTER XXII.

A CHURCH-MEETING.

As when a sudden storm of hail and rain
Beats to the ground the yet unbearded grain,
Think not the hopes of harvest are destroyed
On the flat field and on the naked void :
The light, unloaded stem, from tempest freed,
Will raise the youthful honours of its head,
And soon restored by native vigour bear
The timely products of the bounteous year.

A VESTRY meeting would need no word of explanation, but a Church-meeting is not so well understood. It is, however, the meeting of the members of the Church, when the acts of the Lord in their midst are told out, in the conversion of those now seeking fellowship, or when matters of vital interest to the well-being of the Church are discussed.

Church-meetings differ not only in different Churches but in the same Church at different times. Under certain government they are simply opportunities for hearing vain men talk, while in others they are hallowed gatherings for real spiritual edification and fellowship. They should be the latter, and the latter only ; not business meetings, but meetings for the promotion of spiritual power and for rejoicings at the work of the Lord.

At Zion our Church-meetings had been real times of enjoyment, for there were fresh members admitted and prayer for direction offered and praise for blessing given. The business of the Church was always transacted at the meeting of the deacons, which was held the day before the Church-meeting. So with no apprehension of any departure from the usual order I gave out one Sunday, among others, this notice :

“Deacons’ meeting on Tuesday.” “Church-meeting on Wednesday.”

For some time many of the congregation had been dissatisfied with the salary given to the pastor, and had

expressed a wish that it be increased. Some had spoken to me concerning it; my stereotyped answer had been, "Ask the deacons; that is their matter!"

Not that I was indifferent to the question. How could I be? Our home sorely needed an increased income, God knoweth. Three darling children had He given us, and only Himself knew the pinchings, headaches, weariness we had to endure. My reader knows, though but few of the congregation did, at what a sacrifice I had entered upon the ministry. It might have been wiser had I told them, yet how could I? When and where is a man to speak of these things? The expense of the chapel alterations had been a burden, and although they had nobly met the demand then made, why should a man go cap in hand, when common sense should move the people and officers to think for their chief worker? For, more than one Sunday we had dined upon fare plainer than the men and women who listened to and praised the sermons, had ever known.

I must be just, however, and as I have said, the *people* wished the stipend to be increased. Some of them knew the expenses of an increasing family, the many calls upon a pastor's purse that come not to others, the no small item for "fares" here and there, and the incessant demands of charity that those unaccustomed to the work never know. The congregation had made the request and the matter came before the officers' meeting, as announced.

The meeting of deacons was held in the vestry. Our numbers had increased since the time when we numbered one deacon, all told.

Dionysius Rasper was there. Beside him sat Captain Macdonald, the friend of widows and orphans. Mr. Wiseall, a little lord in the conventicle, who took his seat in his pew at the services, not as a learner but as a judge of "orthodoxy." No one knew the value of mere money better than he. Paying the munificent sum of two pounds per annum for the pew his family occupied, he expected for this sum two good sermons a week at least, and sundry pastoral visits which afforded him opportunity to enlarge upon the need of being orthodox in these times. Mr. Bootall sat next him at the meeting. He was a little round-faced, nearly bald-headed man, who had learned to

find the bright side of everything and never walked on the shady side of the street. Then came Mr. Deadlock, a working man, whose ideas were limited by the one circle which contained himself, his wife and children. Mr. Worth, another working man, one of the most godly and generous-natured of men, and Mr. Leale, a successful merchant, a quiet and unassuming man with an open hand towards all in trouble, an ever ready giver to Christian work. Mr. Worth, in virtue of his office, told of the increase in the pew-rents, so much so that out of this fund they had been enabled to meet the interest upon the chapel debt without making any extra efforts, a state of things which he rejoiced in. In fact finances generally were flourishing, special services were talked over and arrangements made. Then Mr. Dionysius Rasper, rubbing as usual the dust from his hands, coughed, rose and said, "Brethren, some of the *younger*" (emphasis on the younger) "Some of the younger members of the Church have made a request that the pastor's salary be raised. I have told them of our great need several times but they seem determined, so I thought we had better consult together. Our alterations cost nine hundred pounds," he continued. "Our debt when we commenced the alterations was seven hundred pounds. We have paid in all eight hundred pounds and this leaves us with a debt of a similar amount, a very heavy debt for so poor a Church. I promised, however, to introduce the request and now leave it for your consideration." Mr. Deadlock, without rising from his seat, said he thought the request a most untimely one. Times were bad, the Church had only just struggled through the cost of the alterations and his advice was "adjourn the question." Captain Macdonald thought an ill-paid ministry was a disgrace. No men, when they did their duty, worked so hard as they, or had such incessant burdens of cares (other people's as well as their own) to carry. He could not help thinking their minister should be their first consideration.

Mr. Bootall quite agreed with Captain Macdonald. Everybody in the neighbourhood knew their minister was a hard and earnest worker. It was owing to him that the alterations had been made—alterations of which they were all proud, and a large portion of the money to pay for which he had collected. Their minister had never

had his stipend increased and it was about time something was done. Mr. Wiseall could not agree with his brethren who had just spoken. He was glad their minister was orthodox ; a little later on the thing might be done. "It was good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth," and it was owing to their minister that so large an expense had been incurred in the alterations. For his part, although the chapel was improved, yet they had done without the galleries before, and should have paid off the old debt before making any alterations, however needed.

Mr. Leale, who was secretary, said not a word—but carefully took the minutes.

It was resolved to notice the letter sent to the deacons, and to advise the Church to take no action for the present. Such the summary I received. I had absented myself purposely from the meeting. On the next day I said, "Rose, will you come to the Church-meeting to-night, the deacons have resolved to adjourn the question of salary. So we shall pass the candidates for membership, as usual ; always a joy, you know." Rose sighed wearily, "Yes, I will come." Poor Rose, on her fell the weight of the household cares, and to her this action of the deacons was "hope deferred." Dear Rose, she bore her trials bravely and had ever a word of cheer to give me when my heart was sick and sad.

As we entered the school-room, although some minutes before the time of commencing the meeting, it was nearly full. I took the chair. Testimony was given by different brethren, and the proposed candidates passed, and I was about to close the meeting, when Mr. Leale rose and read the resolution passed at the deacons' meeting. Again I rose and was about to close the gathering. "Mr. Chairman," called out a tall, wiry-looking man, "am I in order ? I wish to move that the proposal of the deacons be not agreed to, and that the pastor's salary be raised." Notice that this was one of the objects of the meeting had been given. So I sat down once more. In a speech full of vigour he urged his proposal. Captain Macdonald rose, simply saying, "I second it." I felt in an awkward position. Should I vacate the chair ? On second thoughts I decided not.

Dionysius Rasper rose. As senior deacon he was sorry to find that the Church had not accepted the decision

they had come to in the deacons' meeting. He was more than surprised that one of the deacons should be found to second such a resolution which was clearly conceived in a spirit of opposition to the officers of the Church. He repeated the arguments used at the deacons' meeting, emphasised the amount of the debt as *eight* hundred pounds, and moved as an amendment that the question be postponed for six months. Mr. Wiseall seconded. He was hurt that the decision of men in their position should be counted as nothing. If we had not made the alterations it would be another matter. He emphatically dissented from the position assumed by Captain Macdonald. Mr. Deadlock thought the deacons were being badly treated. The minister had not *asked* for his stipend to be raised, and it was time enough to consider it when he did so.

To my surprise, a Mr. Wiley, whose wife had been suspended from membership shortly before, rose and wished to ask Mr. Rasper, through the chair, "Was it true that such was the state of the Church before their present minister came, that owing to the interest being unpaid upon the mortgage the building was about to be closed? that Mr. Rasper was the only male member in attendance, that he therefore had to perform the various offices of treasurer, secretary, superintendent of the Sunday-school, and deacon. That the debt was then over nine hundred pounds, and that now, with all the cost of alterations, it was one hundred less, and if so, with a balance in the treasurer's hands, how could Mr. Rasper say the Church was not in the position to increase the stipend of the minister? I ask this through you, dear sir," he said, "and am glad you are in the chair to hear the answers which I await." As soon as the applause which greeted his closing words had subsided, I looked at Mr. Rasper, who was sitting at my side. Very reluctantly, and with certain explanations Mr. Rasper answered the questions in the affirmative. One after another spoke; not one against the proposal.

Presently the quiet voice of Mr. Leale was heard: "Brethren and sisters, Mr. Worth reports a large increase in the pew subscriptions. It would be satisfactory if he would furnish us with the amounts." Mr. Worth handed me a slip of paper. I was astonished as I read the figures out. From that source alone the Church was receiving one hundred and fifty pounds more than my

salary. Again Mr Leale rose: "Brethren, it is a simple act of justice the people have asked of us. Shall the man who, under God, has brought all this people, Church and congregation, to this place, who has thus been the means of augmenting the finances, who has turned a dilapidated old building into one of the prettiest chapels in the neighbourhood—shall the man who has done this reap from your gifts no reward of his labours? I mention not the effects of his ministrations, or I might speak of men who have so learned Christ here that they conduct their business in the fear of God—of young men who are devoting themselves to the ministry of the Gospel, of altered homes, changed lives and all the subtle influences God gives to a living ministry and Church. To me, brethren, this appears a duty too long neglected. With your permission I will read you the minutes of the deacons' meeting held last night, that you may know, as you ought to know, from whom the opposition to your request has arisen." He did so, and continuing, said: "I shall now move, as a further amendment, 'The amount arising from the pew subscriptions be given entirely to the pastor, and if ever the amount falls below — it be made up from the Church funds.'"

The excitement of the meeting was intense as Mr. Leale resumed his seat.

Mr. Worth, in seconding Mr. Leale's amendment, said: 'Never once has our pastor mentioned the subject, yet as a Church we have reaped financially the result of his labours—I speak not now of spiritual results. It was from the pew rents we were enabled to meet the large interest of last year. Our chapel filled on Sundays, our school largely increased, and we have been unmindful of the worker. Never may we be guilty again.'

The mover of the first resolution, the tall, wiry man, begged to withdraw his proposition in favour of Mr. Leale's. Captain Macdonald agreed.

"I cannot put this to the meeting," I said. "Perhaps Mr. Leale will do so, and count the votes."

In calm, quiet tones he read the resolution, That the question be postponed for six months, and then his amendment, adding the words, "from this day," which ran thus: That the amount arising from seat subscriptions be given the pastor from this day, and if ever, &c.

This was put first. "Keep your hands up," shouted the excited people. "Mr. Wiley, will you count?" said Mr. Leale. One hundred and fifteen. The resolution was next put. Three. A tempest of applause followed such as I shall never forget, and when a moment's lull occurred, I rose and essayed to speak. Tears filled my eyes. The kind, tender words of the men to whom God had blessed my ministry were too much. The people saw my tearful face and clapped again, some exclaiming, "God bless you, sir. God knows you deserve it." After a while I overcame my emotion enough to find words.

"My dear people, this is a painful surprise to me. I refrained from speaking until you had voted. My words will be few now. Your spontaneous generosity has overcome me. Only under an imperative sense of duty would I speak. You are my witnesses that never have I spoken of my income before. It may be it would have been better if I had, and that a false delicacy has prevented me. My wish is to draw attention to the principle, the false principle which has been put forth by some this evening, namely, that my salary is a gift. It is not. The financial results of my labour are my own. One of the soundest doctrines of civil ethics is, that the products of a man's labour are his own. Does Christianity divest a minister of this fundamental right? Nay, it enforces it. 'Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel.' A minister's income (that is, a man who does his work) is a *divine right*, not a human charity. It is, as Mr. Leale has ably said, the minister who for the most part causes the money to flow into the Church's funds. I am a young man, but I have lived long enough to see noble men broken in spirit, and crushed in their work through niggardly and unjust treatment by those in office around them; men who, when they should have been studying or sleeping, have spent hours in writing letters or calling upon wealthy and generous givers for help towards removing the debt from the shoulders of the Church, or to enable them to enter upon some forward movement. I am anxious, God knows not for myself—my silence until this moment is proof—I am anxious that this Church shall never fall into that fatal mistake. If it ever does, remember my words, such action will not go unrequited. It is simple justice for me to add

that most of the officers with whom you have surrounded me are as far removed from this spirit as the poles are asunder. For my wife and children, for myself, I thank you. Will you allow me to ask you to alter the form in which you have passed the resolution. It would be a sad thing if the minister had so to depend upon his income as to make it hinge upon pleasing the occupiers of the pews. I should be thankful if a fixed sum were stated, little or much, to be the stipend of the minister."

Mr. Leale at once proposed, "That from this date the pastor's stipend be ——."

Captain Macdonald seconded it. No amendment was proposed, and the resolution was carried.

"Friends, God only knows how I have strived to serve you. Your action to-night may cause me some unpleasantness with those who have opposed this movement. I trust not; I pray not. But as some proof of my sincerity in this matter, I will ask Mr. Leale to read you a letter received last week, only asking him to suppress names. Mr. Leale read: "The Church at —— unanimously passed the following resolution: That the Rev. A. Edwards be invited to the vacant pastorate of —— at a salary of ——." The amount was just fifty pounds beyond the amount they had just voted.

"Brethren and sisters," said I, "not even my wife knew of this. Shall I say Yea or Nay? Let me tell you I said Nay, three days since."

I shall not soon forget the look upon the faces of Mr. Dionysius Rasper and Mr. Wiseall. They left without a word. The people came round me, grasped my hands, and bade me rejoice that the opposition was ended.

"Arnold, I never felt how manly you were until to-night; you looked every inch a hero."

"Do you remember my question to you four years since in this very street?" said I.

"I do," and she caught my hand in hers. "God gives to those who trust Him."

Next day a letter came informing me of Deacon Wiseall's resignation. He had decided to remove to Crouch Hill, and could not after this month come to Zion.

That was the only stormy Church-meeting we had. Some may deplore them; but like storms they clear the air.

CHAPTER XXIII.

COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY AND CALLS.

“The noble husbandry of mind
And culture of the heart—
Shall this, with men, less favour find,
Less genuine joy impart?”

WORK at the College, besides the pastorate of Zion, soon forced me to relinquish for a time the afternoon services at the theatre. The studies at College kept me from rusting. “College days!” What a charm there is in the very words! From what various circles were the men drawn! Some straight from following the plough, rough as bears, tender as doves. Strong, robust men; weak and shallow men. Some from merchants’ offices, who had sacrificed splendid prospects, obeying the ancient command, “Go work in My vineyard.” Some were engineers, some shipwrights, some medical students, and some tradesmen’s sons; truly “all sorts and conditions of men.” The men varied quite as much as the positions from whence they came—the egotistical, the self-distrustful and timid, the buoyant, sanguine, the despondent, and sometimes the lazy. Among such a company any peculiarity was quickly seized upon. Was one fond of hearing himself speak with a strong twist of self-esteem, then never a discussion, criticism, or difficult question awaiting answer, but *his* name would be called, until at length it would begin to dawn upon him that there was some latent derision in his apparent popularity. Did one venture to lay claim to a superior faith and tell it out in unctuous weakness, then such enquiry as this would be asked aloud for his especial benefit, “Is it true that one of our brethren was heard by his host praying for a pair of new boots? and is it true that the prayer was heard and a new pair given ere he left the house?” Was one discovered in using as his own another man’s

sermon: "It was a splendid sermon—preached at Ventnall on the death of Moses. It was a pity that one of the deacons had bought it in Paternoster Row the last time he was in London, and should have had it on his dining-room table." Any weakness was deemed a proper butt for wit and banter. Had one displayed capacious powers of digestion, sure enough he would be greeted thus: "I was down at Marshpool the Sunday after you were there, and heard how you enjoyed yourself, and only the bones of the joint were left from dinner, and they had to borrow food from a neighbour for supper."

Merciless treatment! No, no! *Merciful*. A splendid gauntlet for one to run! Foibles cut sharply through, and men made to see their follies *as* follies. This quickness to detect the weaknesses was only an outcome of the absorbing interest of every soul in the work to which they had given their lives. The appreciation of real worth was as quick and true, no matter where or in whom exhibited. No jealousy or envy. Worth was speedily recognised, and unstinted applause given. No set of men could be met with more united in their desire to be true to the purpose of their life; and not least among the real educational processes was this public-spiritedness which hated shams and despised fancies, but loved honesty and talent. Veneer peeled off before the intense flame of manly ardour. Many a time have I thanked God for allowing me to be thrown among the men who were then my fellow-students. Not that they were perfect; far from it; but their whole-heartedness was a great charm. Of course some of us stood in need of advice we pretty frequently received, but we did not always receive it with engrafted meekness. One very high in the realm of letters had been addressing us, and had bidden us to be careful not to think we were all like our beloved President. "Humility became us." It fell to the portion of one of our number to make the next speech, and thus he referred to the advice: "The eloquent and able speech to which we have listened will long abide in our memories, and the appeal with which it closed, that we should learn duly the lesson of humility, we can appreciate. I was walking over Blackfriars Bridge when my attention was attracted by a little table on which a cardboard coach was being drawn by fleas. The exhibitor was a French-

man, and being desirous of ascertaining how he had reduced his lively steeds to such a state of subjection, I said: 'In our county these insects are very lively; how did you tame them?' With the utmost good humour he replied: 'Vell me catch de fleas, dey very lively, but me put dem in a long box wid a glass lid. Very long and narrow is de box. Ven dey go in at dis end dey hop and hit demselves like this.' (He placed his hand with a smart slap on his head.) 'Before dey come to de end of de long box, dey walking very quietly.' I thanked him and walked on, musing thus: we come to College, and we jump, but our tutor's hand comes upon our heads, and long before our curriculum is over, we are very quiet, and walk forth humbly and with much propriety. The learned doctor need have little fear we shall attempt to jump again." The loud applause which followed told how genuinely the illustration had told.

Among these men I spent my time, labouring hard and storing knowledge for future days. One day, cold, drizzling rain was falling, as a few of us wended our way towards the north-western part of the metropolis, having a holiday that afternoon. We ascend the stone steps of a heavy, solid-looking block of buildings known as the London University. The crowd are taking their seats, and the large circle of the building is filling rapidly. Punctual to the hour the noble chancellor, Earl Granville, enters, followed by the vice-chancellor, and attended by a brilliant company of literary men. Amid ringing plaudits the (then) Right Honourable Robert Lowe rises to give the annual address. His words are graceful, his strongly-marked face alight with pleasure. Wit sparkles and wisdom flashes through his speech. Then the chancellor gracefully hands the well-merited diplomas to the various successful students. But why are we here? Two young men step forward. Their appearance is greeted with vociferous cheering from a compact body of men in the hall, and is again renewed as they retire, carrying with them their coveted certificates. Those two men are from our College, and the cheers came from their fellow-students. Thus the solidity and worth of the education received is attested from time to time. They have used their opportunities, and yet they have learned to prize far more highly the power to be successful soul-

winners. Well may the heart of the man who once occupied the walls of that College glow. He sees his fellow-students occupying the most influential pulpits in city and town; nor does his heart glow the less as he thinks of the honourable unknown who are toiling amid the agriculturists in village and hamlet, preaching Christ amid clerical intolerance and priestly assumption.

The days sped on, and the doors of the College I had so longed to enter were left behind me. But among the hundreds who forget not to mention the dear place in prayer may I while on earth be found!

With two of my deacons, Captain Macdonald and Mr. Westall, we were seated in the train, bound for a northern town, where the Baptist Union was holding its autumnal session. One of the questions to be brought prominently forward was that of Evangelistic Work. The chapel was nearly filled when we entered the day after our arrival. After the address of the president, the question of Evangelistic Work was quickly reached. In a few well-chosen words, the chairman called upon the mover of the resolution about to be submitted to the meeting. Rising somewhat quickly and stepping to the front of the platform, is a young man of strongly marked individuality—tall, rather slightly built, his hazel eyes looking forth with pleasant frankness from beneath a broad expansive forehead and curly brown hair. His voice, full throated, and well under control; a fine presence, in which something of the boy lingered in the full-grown man; one whom to see is to trust. "Fathers and brethren," he begins, "it has long been a burden on my heart, that more direct evangelistic work is not accomplished by us as a denomination; nor am I alone in this, feeling for many of my brethren have felt the need. From time to time efforts have been made, which have been attended with success, and yet have only served to reveal the need more clearly. The Churches are asking for some movement to be made in this direction. The cry of those outside our Churches is distinctly heard, and we are one in realising that the time has come for us to respond. It is, as an 'Union,' we must move in giving the Churches an opportunity at least of holding such services without burdening afresh their already over-weighted pastors or severely pressing upon their finances. The testimony of good

already wrought by the limited and intermittent services in which certain pastors have shared seems to indicate the path we should take. Among us there are men eminently qualified for this work. The one difficulty is how *they* can be spared from the Churches over which they preside." He described in pathetic terms the state of some of the Churches known to him; the indifference of some, the real inability of others; and then unfolded his scheme, the main point of which was an appeal to the Churches to set free for a little time their pastors for this work, and closed with an earnest and effective plea for the assembly to find the means, so that the travelling and printing expenses might be defrayed for the poorer Churches, who, in most cases, longed for and needed these services.

These are tame words, but none could convey the impression the speech produced. Some idea may be formed from the fact that then and there money was forthcoming to carry the scheme, and a committee formed to arrange the details. Of that committee I formed one, and a week afterwards, with Blackman, was on my way to the first of these meetings.



CHAPTER XXIV.

A ROUND OF EVANGELISTIC WORK.

AMONG the numerous additions to the congregation at Zion was one who, like Captain Macdonald, was formerly a member at John Street Chapel. His attendance at Zion was of recent date. A broad-shouldered, towering Scotchman; in every way a man of gigantic proportions. His fine large head was well set on his shoulders, and covered with iron-grey hair, of which there was a rich profusion. His brow was broad and massive, in which were deep furrows. For some years he had been proprietor of one of the London Dailies, but just before he appeared in our midst, had sold the "daily," and started a weekly religious paper, named the "Protestant Flag." He was a man of keen perception, of large and generous impulses. His enthusiasm was intense, and moved those around him either into warm adhesion to any principle he advocated, or to warmer defiance.

He was the author of several well-known works. One book of his, which I had carefully read long before I knew him, led me to adopt the practice of observing the Lord's Supper every Sunday morning, in addition to the usual monthly observance of that ordinance in the evening of the first Lord's Day in each month. My acquaintance with Donald Grant ripened from the first day he made himself known to me, and his influence (through his spoken and written words) had much to do with shaping my hold upon certain fundamental doctrines. Often would I find in his paper warm and loving words concerning our work at Zion; and though he never joined the Church there, he remained a constant attendant until his death. His strong advocacy of Protestant principles, his warm, outspoken utterances concerning the advance of ritualism in the Episcopal Church brought him many friends and enemies. He was an uncommon man, and amid the many kind hearts I have loved, Donald Grant

holds no mean place. Would that all young pastors could have in their early ministry such men to befriend them.

The monthly commemoration of the ordinance of the Lord's Supper holds an important place in the services of our denomination. It is then, in some Churches, that the right hand of fellowship is given to new members in the presence of the congregation, and no service is more sacredly solemn. The growth of the membership is apparent. The sight of the new members serves to kindle interest in them, and often the associations attendant thereon are full of pathos and privilege. Thus, if a long-prayed-for son, husband or wife is received, the whole Church is brought by a kind wise word into sympathy and thankfulness. One such season stands forth as ever memorable. Some twelve persons were awaiting the right hand of fellowship *that evening*. I advanced to them as they sat in the pews nearest the platform. My hand was first grasped by a man whose form was somewhat bent with suffering, and face lined with the marks of care. It was my father—*my father*. Gradually the light and truth concerning infant christening and State support and control of the Church had found its way into his mind; and now he had come forth, henceforth to live and labour among the free Churches who follow the Lord's commands in respect to believer's immersion. By his side sat my mother, and next her, my sister Matilda, whose sneer, "We want no Dissenters in our family," had long since been repented. No wonder my voice faltered, and finally failed. In my grasp lay the hand that had caressed me in my childhood and tenderly led me in my youth. The springs of memory were touched. Visions of the Sundays when beside these dear forms I walked to church; of the time when these dear voices bade me prepare to be confirmed; of those other times when I had heard these same voices pleading with God at family prayer. Nor less the times when these voices had ridiculed the very idea of my becoming a Schismatic, a Dissenter, and had earnestly entreated me to stay in the Church so dear to them then. No wonder my voice was hushed. Now these loved ones were sealing their confession, and at the hands of their youngest-born were received into the Church of Jesus Christ in the Baptist Denomination. Truly God had led me by a

strange path! The mountains of opposition had been levelled. A wave of visible emotion passed over the congregation as I stood with father's hand locked in mine. Was this the way God answered that prayer of mother's at the family altar the night of the decision to leave Dowchester, a pledge that all the family should be united in the bonds of spiritual union.

It was that same evening I announced our intended visit to the north, and besought my people to remember us day and night in our labour of love.

Next morning, when I reached the railway station, I found Blackman awaiting my arrival; and we were soon being rapidly borne towards the first stage of our journey on the first evangelistic tour of the new movement in our denomination. Several Churches had combined to give us welcome, and our scene of labour extended over a widely-scattered district. It was five o'clock in the evening when we arrived at a large town famous for shipbuilding, where we were to commence. The pastor met us; and during tea we ascertained that all the announcements of the services made consisted of the distribution of five hundred handbills. As might be expected, the attendance was not large. The fault—was it any one's fault? The pastor seemed in earnest in his welcome, and would not surely have joined in the invitation if he had not desired our services. Some men, however, never rise to an emergency, and it must have been want of foresight and judgment.

These kind of services vary much, and I have learned to gauge pretty much the hope of success or otherwise from the atmosphere of the Church to which we may go. If the pastor is trying "Evangelistic Services," not that he is in sympathy with any special efforts, but the Church is in a low condition and something must be done, then my experience is that the evangelist is tolerated and will be patronized, and is generally looked upon as a well-intentioned, earnest, but probably mistaken man. Oh, it is a delightful (?) experience to stand in a pulpit around which icicles unmistakably hang—icicles in the choir, icicles in the vestry, icicles in the pew. It is so conducive (?) to that home feeling which earnest men know so well how to prize!

One is made to feel that heat is all very well for

the kitchen, but is quite out of place in the drawing-room church. Such experiences are the exception, but more common than one would imagine. One instance will suffice. I must, however, precede this by stating that Blackman was a man of unquestioned power. His praise in the Gospel was in all the Churches. His own sphere of labour was one of the largest in the metropolis. His words were winged, and flew straight as an arrow. He covered no sin, laid it bare with swift, strong words, but he was exceptionally tender of heart, and an indescribable pathos pulsed in his very voice.

We were waiting in the vestry of a chapel, some fifty miles from the cold icicle church, where we were to meet one of the pastors from a large neighbouring town, famous for dyes and coal. He entered, introduced himself, and thus began: "We have arranged for *one* service in our chapel." He was a man of some literary attainments; his Church one of some fair amount of influence in the north.

"*One?*" said Blackman, inquiringly.

"Yes; we deem one sufficient."

"May I ask why, with an influential Church like yours, and situated as it is in the very centre of the town, you have deemed one sufficient?"

"Oh, our people do not much care for this sort of thing."

"It is not *your* people we want to reach, but those who seldom if ever come to the house of God."

"Yes; but we have also arranged for you to speak at two of the foundries to the men in the dinner hour."

"Why did you ask us down then, if you do not want us? We understood it was the unanimous request of the united Churches."

"We did and do unite, but we think one service enough for our place; we have something on every evening, and do not care to disturb the regular services and meetings."

I here interposed. "I understood your deacons and Church to have joined in the request. Are we to understand that they think with you?"

"Well, yes; we have a meeting about the matter to-morrow afternoon, and if you like to come we will talk the matter over. But" (pulling out his watch and looking

intently at it) "I have to catch my train; I must be going."

"Go!" said Blackman, "and next time you need us, write and say for how long!"

"One moment," said I, "you know the large Church Blackman has left. You are sure if we did not love the work we should not come. Is this quite the way to treat men called and sent by the Union of our denomination?"

"Come over to-morrow. I am very sorry I cannot stay."

"Edwards, you may go, as I feel now I could not unless I change my mind. It is a shame to bring us from a prayerful people and our homes, and place us for one night in the one church, just to keep up the appearance of unity."

At the last Blackman altered his mind and came. Sharp words passed, which we will also let pass, but the deacons very earnestly urged us to come back and hold more services.

"No; you evidently do not require us, and if we came we should disturb some of your ordinary services, so we were told, anyway."

They expressed their readiness to do anything we wished, but we remained firm to our determination, and although the one service held resulted in leading a wild, wayward youth, son of one of our ministers, to the feet of Christ, we only held there that one service.

Caution is to be admired. We would blame no minister for not receiving any evangelist with open heart and arms until he has seen his methods, and is assured of his genuineness, but to treat men known in the denomination like this was unwarrantable, not to say unchristian.

Not often were we so treated; indeed only in this one case in the whole three weeks we were holding these services. The rule was to find a hearty fraternal welcome from the brethren, and sympathy and co-operation from the people. Strange and varied the scenes through which we passed! Once we were claimed by an old woman, who had "always lodged the preacher," and would not be denied. In a moment of weakness the pastor had yielded, and to her tender mercies we were committed. Having sent our portmanteaus from the station to her home, we went to take tea with the pastor. From thence to the services. I can never think of these but with emotion.

Afternoon and evening those strong-bodied iron-workers filled the building. Afterwards the vestries were filled with the anxious inquirers. Oh! those scenes! Strong men with hands clasped in very agony. Swarthy faces, upon which stood great hot tears. Women sobbing in silent prayer for the conversion of son or husband. When once the deeps of their being were broken up they were as simple as little children. One man, who had found peace in Jesus the night previous, had induced his wife to come, and was standing behind me, as I was trying to show her the way of peace more perfectly. At last light broke into her troubled soul also, and with a face radiant with joy, she exclaimed, "I see! I see! Jesus bore it all for me, loves me and died for me." Before I could say one word, the burly figure had stepped forward, flung his arms around her, and with a kiss which resounded through the chapel, said, "E'e lass! yer a new wife and I'm a new mate, and we'll begin life anew," and with hands on her shoulders he knelt, pouring out a prayer that brought heaven wondrously near. I thought my hand would have been wrenched from my wrist as he clasped it in his. "The Lord Almighty bless ye and gie ye mony more mates and wives."

Blackman had been equally busy, and over sixty were added to that Church from these services.

That particular evening, tired and worn with the work, we made our way to our host's. It was a miner's cottage. We were shown into a room on the ground floor; there was no upper; the window so low that we could easily have stepped through it into the street. Just along this window stood the bedstead. A table was laid for supper. A small wooden washstand and a few chairs completed the furniture. A blazing fire made the room look cheerful.

"Wad ye tak' a drink?" So the woman addressed us, as we proceeded to place our overcoats on one of the chairs.

"Water, thank you." Without a word she took the glasses from the table, and filled them from the jug on the washstand. Observing this, I said, "We like plenty of water to wash with in the morning."

"All reet, onything ye'd like, ca' oot an' I'll coom."

We ate our supper, talked, and were going to bed, when the door opened. "Ye'll no lock the door · I'll be

up afore ye in the mornin' and will need com'in to lit the fire."

Left to ourselves we laughed, and wondered how many poor, timid parsons had slept there!

We were aroused about five in the morning by the patter, patter of what sounded like a whole regiment of wooden legs. It was the workpeople on their way to the mills and pits. We had dozed again, when the crackling of burning wood caused us to open our eyes, and there stood our hostess lighting the fire. Shortly afterwards she laid the breakfast and said, "I'll bring in the coffee soon." I sprang out of bed, locked the door, and we dressed in peace. On Sunday Blackman and I were parted, he to the agricultural, and I to the pit district, right away in the wilds of Durham. This time I was located at the minister's house, and very comfortable did they make me. If our first visit was to the land of ice, this was the other extreme. A warmer set of enthusiasts one could not wish to meet.

Prayer meetings were held, and I heard such prayers as I shall not soon forget.

"Lord," said one rough, bronzed-faced man, "we have seen that the very hens are grateful; they teach us to look up to heaven, for they never drink without thanking Thee." "Make us all hens!" ejaculated a brother by his side.

Another expressed himself thus: "Lord, we have seen a woman wash her babe clean, and then cuddle it to her bosom; Oh Lord, wash us, and cuddle us to Thy big bosom." It was a rough, crude figure, but it meant much to these warm-hearted giant men.

The three weeks sped on. We finished the Friday evening in another of the iron-towns, caught the night express, and I came home to find three of my children sick with the scarlet fever, and Rose tired and worn with constant nursing. 'Twas hard to get heart and brain to work together, yet the Gospel of Jesus Christ *can* take a man out of himself—no, take himself into *it*, and I found on that Sunday, as often before and since, that "Our hope is in God."

The next week I took my turn watching our eldest, who was tossing between life and death. So shadows fall on every home.

CHAPTER XXV.

WORK IN LANCASHIRE.

THE evangelistic movement once fairly inaugurated, many brethren were called into the service. Arrangements were made for wide-spread and sustained labours in many counties. This would have been impossible but for the willingness of the Churches to spare their pastors, and thanks are due to them for their readiness to help in this matter. To the ministers thus set free the work itself was a blessing. Their experience of men and Churches was considerably enlarged and many new lessons did they learn. To me, besides and beyond this, it was a fresh revelation of the perfect adaptability of the Gospel to the needs of men.

The work of Zion still went successfully onward. Many young men had gathered around us and we made special efforts to induce and retain this class. Among these efforts we arranged, once a quarter, a Sunday Morning Breakfast specially and only for the business young men. Tickets previously sold were the one means of invitation and thus four times in the year we were privileged to meet from two to three hundred young business men. More than once, that large-hearted, warm-souled man, George Williams, founder of the Young Men's Christian Association, presided and gave the address. These young men came from all parts of the great metropolis and many became associated with us in Church fellowship and some of them became our invaluable helpers in open-air and mission work. At this time three of these dear fellows had applied for admission into *the* College of which you have heard. They were successful, and their help gladly rendered was extremely acceptable.

One Sunday evening a large crowd had assembled, when I saw the "landlord" of the "Blue Bell" at the corner of the street go across the road into the police-

station. Presently a policeman came, just as my address was coming to a close, and told me I must "move on."

"I have just finished," said I, and stepped aside.

One of the young students (who was helping) gave out a hymn and then began to address the people. The policeman had himself "moved off," and after waiting a few minutes and seeing no sign of interruption I went to the chapel close by. I had been there some ten minutes when I was called to go at once to the police-station. I did so.

"This man has been obstructing the thoroughfare and will have to meet the charge," said the inspector. "He wants bail."

"Very well: I will be bail for him."

The people had naturally followed to the station and when they saw us leave, they as naturally followed us to and into the chapel. I saw that more than a passing interest was aroused and at the close of the service inside (which I had shortened considerably) said: "Friends, as many of you know, we have been most unwarrantably interfered with in our open-air meeting. One of our number has to meet the charge laid against him at the instigation of a publican. We will pray God to over-rule this for His glory, and after a short time spent thus in prayer we will hold another service on the steps of this building."

We did so, the whole people entering heartily into the proceedings. The other two students were with us and we had a glorious time; indeed the people seemed loth to go. As we were only fifty yards from the spot from which we were ordered away, our friend the publican must have felt he had made a mistake—for he certainly had an "extra" service calling his attention.

Monday morning, at the Clerkenwell Police Court, "prisoner" was charged with obstructing the thoroughfare. Prisoner described himself as a "Theological student." I know not why, but this caused a roar of laughter, which was of course instantly repressed. Testimony was given, (not a *very* truthful one) by the policeman, and I was anxiously wishful to raise my voice, when without further comment the magistrate leaning forward said: "No jurisdiction: case dismissed." To this day the decision seems strange to me, but there it stands recorded, and we

left the court feeling a reverent wonder which found expression thus : " God does answer prayer." We continued our preaching on that spot and had no further interruption from the police.

Other interruptions we had : a drunken man staggering and pushing his way through the crowd. " I say, old feller, e'ers a ha'penny, I likes what you say uncommon." I took the coin saying, " Thanks, stop and listen. I have better things to say yet." Another time, a labouring man came from the door of the public-house where he had been standing, saying, " What lies you tell ! there aint no such place as hell nor heaven." I saw he was sober and asked the people to make way for him, saying, " I have long been wanting some one to *prove* to me there is no hell, and here is a friend ready to do so. Come along, sir, we will readily listen." He came a step or two and then halted. " Come, sir, we shall be really glad to hear you."

With great readiness, he replied, " After you, sir ; I want time to prepare." So on I went, and so did he, for when I paused and looked, lo ! he was not.

At other times those who interrupted were not so easily quieted, but good-humour and kindness invariably conquer. One secret I learned. Say your best in the open-air. Men will listen, but not unless they can at once understand your drift.

Notwithstanding the increase of work, blessed increase at home, I managed to go once and again on evangelistic tours, some of which took me away three weeks at a time. Rose never murmured, though these long absences from home threw much extra labour upon her.

Our eldest girl had so far recovered, that we were enabled to send her to a quiet home in the country for a season, but she was far from well and the fever had left sad results.

About this time I went for three weeks into Lancashire. The plan was to embrace the whole Rossendale Valley, now lined with villages and cotton-towns, and to include two services every day.

It was past five in the evening when I stepped from the train and a persistent drizzling rain was falling. My host met me with real Lancashire welcome, and while warming myself by the genial fire and burdening my

inner man with hot Lancashire cakes, my reader may learn a little of the district into which I had come.

The historian of Rossendale says, "The ancient Chase or Forest of Rossendale has little or no Roman history. Rossendale held out no inducements to tempt the Roman to its fastnesses, or lead them to select it as a place of habitation. Its first inhabitants were doubtless Celtic Britons, scant in number and barbarous in their social and domestic habits and in their religious customs. Probably the Druids worshipped within its glades, but, if so, all traces of them have perished. The hills of Rossendale are many and stand as sentries hoar with age, to guard its growing population. It is here the famous river Irwell takes its rise, for once Chinger, from whence it springs, was constituted part of the Forest of Rossendale. Springing from the bleak hill-side, it meanders through no delicious gardens or flower-covered glades. Other scenes suit best its dark waters: the abodes of men, the hives of labour, where the busy hammer is heard, where the endless whirr of the spindle and loom bring gladness and joy to the fireside of the thrifty operative. It is, as *Newbiggin* says, "a noble work-a-day river, with swarthy face, winning the children's bread." But if Rossendale fosters the river which does so much work for its children ere it enters the Mersey, it also glories in the sturdy sons who have made its name famous as the home of independent thought and broad and healthy political views.

Here wrought those godly men, William Mitchell and David Crossley, two itinerant preachers, who held strict Calvinistic views and believers' immersion. These men carried the Word of God into this valley. They traversed its lonely dismal mountains and darkling vales, and with peculiar fervour and simplicity gathered crowds to hear the Word of the Lord from their lips. Mitchell endured imprisonment under the enforcers of the Conventicle Act, but he and his cousin Crossley founded Churches, the descendants of which enjoy the privileges these men suffered and fought for but which they were denied.

The shrewd and enterprising character of the people enters into their religious habits and many a preacher has found that the men of Rossendale "know a thing or two," especially doctrine.

Among such a people, nursed in the loneliness of their

wild scenery, superstition and dry humour are found, coupled with an enthusiastic love of music. Stories of queer men and doings abound. Of one, a schoolmaster named Lord, it is recorded that he wove the multiplication and other tables into song and, (seated on a raised platform,) would discourse the music from his violoncello, while his pupils sang :—

“Three 3’s are 9, three 4’s are 12,
 Three 5’s are 15 sure, sir,
 And three times 6 are just 18,
 Which wants 2 of a score, sir :
 Now three times 7 are 21,
 Three 8’s are 24, sir,
 And three times 9 are 27,
 Indeed, they are no more, sir.

And so on through the table, ending with :—

“So now, brave boys, with cheerful minds
 Let every one take care, sirs,
 To add, subtract, and multiply
 The dividend to share, sirs,
 The quotient properly to place,
 And give each man his due, sirs,
 Which by the divisor multiplied
 Will prove if all be true, sirs.”

So fond of music and such their excellence as musicians that the inhabitants of one part, called Dean Valley, bore the title of “Deyghn Layrocks.”

Edwin Waugh gives the following truthful picture of this people. “In the twilight of a glorious Sunday evening in the height of summer, I was roaming over the heathery waste of Swinshawe, in company with a musical friend of mine, when we saw a little crowd of people coming down a moorland slope in front of us. Coming nearer we found they had musical instruments with them, and saw they were working people of the district. My friend inquired where they had been. ‘We bin to a bit ov a sing dean i’ th’ Deighn.’ ‘Well,’ said he, ‘can’t we have a tune here.’ ‘Sure, yo con, wi o’ th’ plezzar i’ th’ world.’ They then arranged themselves in a circle round their conductor, and they played and sang several fine pieces of psalmody upon the heather-scented mountain top.”

Many are the stories over which I have laughed as unfolded by my various hosts during this journey. Connected with one of the chapels I visited was an old man, who in the days of his youth was most ambitious to figure as a local preacher. At last the desire of his heart was granted, and he found himself appointed to a small chapel some few miles from his own place of worship. The report of that first sermon has been preserved and thus it came to me.

Before giving out his text he prefaced it by saying, "Mo friends, I'm nobbut a workin' mon and I canno' gie ye fine langwige but i ca gie ye th' best i got"—He then announced his text thus: 'Awake, pa-sal-tree and harp,' and proceeded: 'Yo see theer be two persons i' my text, and ye may vary well conclude they be mon and wife. The name of th' mon, Pa-sal-tree, and that o' th' wuman, Harp.' He then dilated upon the beauties of mutual delight in the service and duties of home, and continued: 'Yo see as how David wor a good pastor and visitor and he had no doubt bin roun' th' village early on Sunday and seein' the blinds still down where these people lived, he puts his head in at th' door and cries out, "Awake, pa-sal-tree and harp."' Whether this be authentic or not, it might be, for we met with many quaint, shrewd men, who were woefully uninstructed. These, however, were few, relics of a passing generation.

For strength of character commend me to the men of Rossendale. The very cottages in which they live, bewray them—strong, durable, unpretentious, but exceedingly solid. So if we ascend one of the hills and stand in the palatial residence of some wealthy manufacturer. No stucco walls and wooden frame fronts here—stone or marble, solid, and within huge fires that fling a hearty welcome right to the threshold. So the owners strong and gentle, shrewd and warm-hearted.

Tea finished, I made my way down the narrow slope to the chapel. The place was crowded with an audience of Lancashire operatives. The following day, according to arrangements, my work began with three o'clock service in the adjacent little town. Walking along with one of the manufacturers who took a deep interest in the evangelistic movement,—one of the "Measters," as they are called,—he said, "Cannot expect many to afternoon

services, the 'hands' will be at work." Just then he caught up with a young woman. "Janet, have mill stopped?"

"Ay, we asked measter; he said he were willin."

So it proved. The mill hands had presented their plea for a half-holiday and had obtained it. Afternoon and evening the chapel was crowded. From over hill and through dale the people came. How they drank in the Word of Life. The seed sown by those godly men amid persecution and trial was bearing rich fruit. No wonder the renowned Whitefield should write to Lady Huntingdon, in 1749: "I have preached to many thousands at Rosindale, Aywood and Halifax." Right through the valley, in every town or village the same scene. As one said, "Only open the doors of the chapel and they come in." One scene I can never forget. The town was one just rising above the edge of the river on the hill-side. The pastor of the Church had been ill, sorely ill, nigh unto death. I went at once to his house, and found him considerably better. Turning his pale face to me, he said, "I have longed so for this hour. I hope to come to the service, please God."

He was a man of middle height, thin, pointed face, iron-grey hair, soft dark eyes, features drawn from long sickness. He was known the valley through as the "Weeping Prophet."

"Do you really mean to come to the service? It is time I was going. Can I help you?"


He rose, leaning upon my arm and his stick, and tottered the few paces from his house. The place was crowded and we entered from the front as nearest. The whole audience rose, and every face was turned towards him with mingled fear and delight. It was the progress of a king. Ejaculations could be heard from all over the chapel, "God be praised," "the God of Israel bless him," "Here be th' prophet." When we were seated in the pulpit (for he came up with me) I could see the tear-drops glistening on the cheeks and eyelashes as the afternoon sun flung its beams athwart their faces. How I preached I know not. It was as if we sat in the Bethany home, and "Lazarus was there." I asked him to close the meeting, and when leaning on his staff he tottered to the front, standing in a silence of emotion he could not break, the stillness was as if the light of coming glory had

awed the people. How they loved him! No wonder. Thrice had he thrust back the offered advance upon his poor salary with a 'Na', I ha' no need, my wants are few, and ye'll no let the Lord's servant want.' He has gone to his rest, but I cherish very reverently the memory of Jonathan Hargreaves. The closing Sunday of this term was spent in Clough Fold.

High on the hill does Zion Chapel stand. Its history, a chequered and momentous one. When the Act of Uniformity was passed, so strong was the Puritan element in this country that nearly one hundred ministers gave up their livings, among them a Mr. Kippax, incumbent of New Church, who was connected with the origin of the Baptist Church at Clough Fold. This Church was organised in the year 1675. One who remembers the intolerance exhibited towards the Puritans in those ages will understand through what pain and toil a Church then founded must have come. For thirty years they worshipped in private houses, removing from one to another as the exigencies of the times required.

The building now occupied by the Church at Clough Fold is of substantial stone, beautifully finished internally and with rare mahogany, and is both commodious and pretty.

The Sunday of which I write was a cold, biting day. Snow crystals driven by the keen wind met the faces of those who ventured forth. Thrice that day was the chapel crowded, forms up the aisles and more than one in the pulpit. Some stood in the lobby exposed to the snow during the whole service. I was sorry to leave and yet glad once more to be home. Lancashire holds no minor place in my affections. Friendships formed thus and ties knit amid the sacred work of evangelising endear any place, but the strength of character and warmth of heart made Rossendale doubly so.



CHAPTER XXVI.

JOHN DIMSDALE'S BAPTISM.

WHILE God prospered the preached word to the winning of souls, some earnest men sought college training. One such, who had given proof of marked abilities, entered my study one evening. He came to seek advice. He wished to preach Jesus and enter the ministry, but could not see his way to immersion as the *only* Scriptural mode of baptism. His early days had been spent among the Wesleyans, and while he so far believed it to be the duty of those who saw immersion to be Scriptural to obey, he could not see that infant or adult sprinkling was unscriptural. John Dimsdale was a real worker. He shirked no difficulty, and many a time stood by me in the open-air services amid opposition, and he it was who was taken to prison and for whom I stood bail. He is now in the ministry himself, preaching Christ and baptizing those who thus confess our Lord. For some time he could not see the necessity of immersion. His difficulties were not theoretical or visionary. After meeting him to study the subject from the only Book that has *any* authority to speak upon the matter, he came one evening to my house.

"Pastor" (he always addressed me thus), "you believe that men and women who love Christ, and have not been immersed, will be in heaven, do you not?" With a smile I answered:

"Of course I do, John; I believe that all who love and serve Christ will have entrance administered."

"So I think and believe. Does it not seem strange to you that so many good Christian people fail to see the necessity for immersion?"

"Not altogether, John. We find it very difficult to dismiss early training from our minds. I had a hard struggle before I felt it to be my duty to be immersed."

"Ay, but these good people, and I am among the number, do not *feel* it to be their duty."

"Nor need we wonder. Think how seldom the command is brought before them! When did you hear a sermon on the duty of obeying this command of Christ?"

"Well, never until I heard you! Only we were urged to bring our children to dedicate them to the Lord in His house."

"Let me say" (interposing) "at once, that is another matter. I feel that some dedicatory service for infants might be useful, and would certainly answer the desire of many a parent's heart. Yet then there would be no need for water at all, and the family altar is the place for that, is it not?"

"Yes, in Christian families, but many have no family prayer, and what are they to do?"

"Well, face your own questions. If the children are dedicated to God as a mere ceremony, and are left without Christian training, had it better not be left undone, for surely the parent would think some good had been done the child through the service, and you have sacerdotalism in its worst form. Leave that, however, and let us once more go through the question. You know, 'baptize' means to plunge, immerse, dip, and indeed is only an Anglicised form of the Greek word meaning what I have said. So we will not go into that matter."

"Yes, pastor, I am obliged to confess that the meaning of the word is as you say. It is almost unanimously acknowledged so to be by the best writers on the question."

"Then follow me, will you? and ask any question. If I can answer you I will."

"Our Lord went down into Jordan and was immersed by John; and He said, 'Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.' Did He not?" (Matt. iii. 15.)

"Yes."

"Jesus commanded His disciples to immerse, and, as you know, the great commission is couched in these words, 'Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.' (Matt. xxviii. 19, 20.) Now the command was given for all ages, and the baptism *then*

practised was immersion. Do you think we have any right to alter it ? ”

“ No ; but is there any need to keep to the *form* if the thing itself is set forth ? ”

“ Again, look at the commission. You know that infants have no right to baptism, for those who are baptized are to accept, to believe the ‘ teaching.’ I know you admit faith should precede baptism in the one baptized. (Mark xvi. 16.) Why seek to alter the mode of the baptism ? Did not our Master know whether it would be warm or cold as to climate in the place where this command would be obeyed ? ”

“ What you say seems consistent ; but look at the number of Christian people who do not obey the command.”

“ In most cases this arises from the false meaning, the untrue meaning given the word ‘ baptism ’ and the ordinance itself. In my childhood, and I suppose in yours also, we were led to accept the teaching of our Church. The practice of infant sprinkling *seemed* to be the fulfilment of any Scriptural reference to baptism, and we never roused ourselves to ask if it were wrong or right.”

“ Do you think, then, that the neglect of the ordinance, as to immersion, arises from ignorance ? ”

“ I must come to that conclusion. In how many cases do you find the early error so deeply planted, that if you state the Scripture command, if your statement is not met with a denial, you are told it is quite unimportant. Now this is not so with the only other ordinances Christ commanded, *viz.*, preaching, and the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper, is it ? ”

He sat with his face resting on his hands some time. At last he said, slowly :

“ Well, my mother was a good Christian woman, and she was never immersed, and I am sure she read her Bible and is now with Christ. Do you think she was wrong ? ”

“ If you mean that she wilfully neglected or put aside the command, most decidedly so. Your mother was trained in a Church where, if ever adult baptism was spoken of, it was only so as a matter of much or little water, and she accepted what her teachers said. Will

you try and put all sentiment and associations from your mind, and follow my way of putting this matter?"

Rousing himself, for he had spoken as if in reverie, he said, "I will."

"Then we will suppose our Lord is here in this room, and is sending us out to preach the Gospel He commits to our charge. We have been with Him as were His disciples. The common and only mode of baptism upon confession of faith in Him had been immersion. Now would there be a shadow of questioning or doubt as to *what He meant* when He told us to baptize those who believe in His name, the Father's, and the Holy Spirit's?"

"No, I think we should *go on doing as we had done while He was with us.*"

"Have you not answered your own doubts?"

"Not quite. May not times, circumstances, warrant the change in the mode?"

"Dimsdale, if I did not know how earnest you are, I should think you were trifling; but let me remind you further as to the mode, that immersion is the only mode that is a *true symbol*, an outward sign of that which the believer confesses. Paul uses this in a very emphatic manner. (Col. ii. 12.) 'Buried with Him in baptism' are the words he uses, referring to the immersion of these Ephesian believers as supplying them with the symbol of their faith. They were dead to the world as a buried one is dead to his old society and companions on earth. Now, *if* the ordinance is changed, how can sprinkling set forth a death and a resurrection? What rising to new life and living does the act of sprinkling set forth?"

"But is not baptism a confession of faith in Christ?"

"Decidedly; but the ordinance through which the confession is made must signify and set forth the fact, and death and resurrection is the fact."

"But many who have been baptised do not live as Christian people should, and the ordinance seems to me so solemn."

"So it is undoubtedly. It is a funeral service, and sets forth both the death with and the rising with Christ. That many who are baptized thus fail to live as they ought to live is true. Judas was among the disciples, and had he been the only one not baptized the brethren would have had room to wonder at his professions at

least. Failures in no way affect the duty of those who are sincere; besides the onus is thrown upon the individual. Only those who wish to be, are baptized. You know it is contrary to all Scripture teaching to make one answer for another in these matters, and I am sure you would not defend the mistake as to godmothers and godfathers."

Another long pause.

"Did not Paul say he was not sent to baptize?" (1 Cor. i. 17.)

"Yes; but he did baptize, for he tells us he baptized Crispus, and Gaius, and the household of Stephanas (1 Cor. i. 14-16). It is unfair to him to make him speak as if he thought lightly of this ordinance. He laboured among many difficulties, one of which he gives *as his* reason for leaving others of his helpers to immerse the converts. 'Lest any should say that I had baptized in my own name' (1 Cor. i. 15). On the same principle he refused all monetary help from *one* of the Churches, though we know from his own words he accepted it from another Church, for he thanked them that they had thus thought to care for his necessities through Epaphroditus." (Phil. iv. 18.)

"Were not children immersed?"

"You are thinking of the 'households,' I expect. Lydia would appear to have been a single woman, and her household would be her servants. The jailor's household, we are told in the narrative, were baptized, *believing* in God (Acts xvi. 33, 34); and the household of Stephanas were old enough, as Paul says, to have 'addicted themselves to the ministry.' (1 Cor. xvi. 15.) A child may certainly be immersed *if* credible evidence is given of conversion. But think over these things, and you know that any time I shall be glad to baptize you."

Not long after this, one Wednesday evening, John Dimsdale professed his faith in Jesus by public immersion. Standing by the side of the baptistry, he addressed the people assembled, among whom were many of his once companions.

"It cannot be questioned that baptism is a special and positive ordinance of Christ. It was a public and formal abrogation of the Mosaic ceremony, and an authoritative establishment of the Christian dispensation. It

marks a new era in the history of the Church. Why? Because it was a symbol of the washing of the soul from sin and pollution, by the Holy Spirit. It is an outward sign of an inward and spiritual grace—not a representative spiritual grace, but of that of which the subject is conscious. It is a solemn personal consecration to God. The evidence of Scripture is all in favour of believers' baptism. Confession of sin, repentance and faith are necessary to baptism. *We do not find one single case of infant baptism in the Bible.* Immersion is the mode, and when we consider its sacred character, such objections as the decency, modesty, and propriety of immersion, the differences of the climate, its effect upon age or health or weakness, all vanish. While a difference of opinions respecting the mode and subjects of baptism should not prevent the free communion of the Churches, we are earnestly to hold the unity of the faith—one *Lord*, one *faith*, one *baptism*. (Eph. iv. 5.) 'For as many of you as have been baptized into Jesus Christ have put on Christ.' (Gal. iii. 27.) So after full and prayerful deliberation I have been led to follow my Lord's example and obey His command."

To-day John Dimsdale is preaching the Gospel, and has himself baptized many who believe in Jesus.

We numbered him amongst our most earnest workers until the time of his entering College. Nor was he the only one who, from early training or from complete neglect of any reference to the immersion of Christ as our example and of His command, had never even thought of baptism as a duty in those who love Him.

It is no easy matter to erase early training, yet if in "keeping His commandments there is great delight," neglect to search for or indifference to His clear commands can hardly be consistent with sincere love to Him whom we call Master and Lord.

CHAPTER XXVII.

VARIOUS SCENES IN A MINISTER'S LIFE.

WHILE to any earnest man such scenes as I have described of necessity stir and animate, and with a power all their own urge the worker onwards, they exhaust the vital forces and leave the worker conscious of less physical power. The incessant travelling, new scenes, new friends, the excitement of all others the most wearing, making large demands upon the sympathy and compassion, tend to make seasons of rest a necessity. Herein appears the wisdom of the plan unfolded to the Union by him who founded this evangelistic movement. The worker comes back to his own sphere of work with an increased knowledge of mankind. He has been privileged to witness often in an unusual manner the power of the Gospel. His experiences are a source of power. He gains what he otherwise would not know, at least to the same extent, while on the other hand, the people he visits on these journeys and to whom he preaches have the advantage of all the freshness of thought and manner, which is inevitable in one who is not regularly engaged in what is known as evangelistic work.

The work of "the ministry" has often been philosophised and written about. It is time the work of "*the minister*" should be as widely known. Superficial and often supercilious talkers speak of young men "choosing" the ministry as a last resource. It may be so. It is so in some cases undoubtedly. Some weakling, who is too much of a coward for either army or navy, may be sent into the Church. Some, too consequential and unstable to make headway in commerce or handicraft, may find their way into some country pastorate; but if we admit that there are such (few in proportion to the able and devoted men), the admission carries with it one of two things. If the people knowingly *choose* such a man, then the

blame of his being in the ministry of the free Churches lies with them. If they, the people, the Churches, the congregation, have no choice and are open to have such forced upon them, then the *system* under which it is done is to blame. The law of demand and supply is in force here as elsewhere. It is as apparent as the sunlight that the vast majority of the ministry in every section of the Church have some qualifications for their work. Given this, be the qualifications superfine or common, it will be wise to survey the unseen side of the minister's life, ere judgment as to fitness is pronounced. To visit the sick and dying, to relieve the distressed, whether impostors or the honest poor, to listen to the story of blighted hope and cruel disappointments, not once now and then, but day after day; to stand in the home death has made desolate, to soothe the sorrowing; to know the secret anguish of the husband, wife, father, mother, son or daughter; to hear of embarrassments told to no other; to see the once promising child drifting away from all that is moral and true under special temptation; to see the widow and orphan writhing under oppression, or to find under the burden of success the generous heart withering and becoming seared in selfishness; all thus calling forth sympathy and practical help; to minister to these, and so to minister as not to wound but help; make a demand upon one man which those who know it not can scarcely imagine. It is not only as the father bearing the burden of his family, but all the families of his Church look to and pour into the ears of their minister their several burthens. On the other hand, to bear the opposition of the non-Christian and the self-indulgent; to find those to whom appeal is made to help some scheme for raising the fallen or elevating the people, laugh at the idea as Utopian and refuse the aid they could give; to find, again, those upon whom reliance has been placed, half-hearted and fast becoming worldly; to answer the demands made, and rightly made, by the advocates of popular movements in the social or political or educational worlds, knowing that this advocacy means that some will be offended; to inculcate right principles, sometimes in the face of a crude and mistaken popular opinion; to feel these or any part of these surely argues that there is

more in the man who does this than a mere superficial critic of sermons can ever gauge.

I was seated one evening in the house of one of my deacons, a solicitor of some repute, a shrewd good man, and we had drawn around the fire when he said :

"What is your opinion of this new movement, Mr. Edwards ? this new development of Christian work ?"

"Difficult to answer you offhand. That they are making a noise is certain."

"Yes, and getting plenty of money and converts, if we may judge from their reports."

"That does not astonish me. There is a good deal of thoughtless giving among Christian people, both in matters of charity and religion."

"But you will admit the numbers they give as to their membership is startling ?"

"But *what* is membership with them ?"

"Say conversion."

"Would you be warranted in saying that, or does it mean merely adhesion to their body ?"

"They require repentance and faith anyway."

"Is a public parade of my past misdoings—an evident glorying in what I was—a sign of repentance and sorrow ? Does not a man take *out* of his window the goods he has learned to be ashamed of, not show them to every passer-by ?"

"But," he interrupted, "their lives are changed anyway."

"Undoubtedly, and so far so good. If you can get a man to move in a circle where he will be made ashamed of his past habits, and to resolutely put them away, you have done much. Thus, if you make a drunken man sober, but would you call that conversion in the Gospel and Scriptural sense ?"

"Well, isn't it ?"

"No and yes. It is a change in life and habit, but not necessarily a *change of heart*. It may be repentance for former folly, but not repentance toward God. You have some clerks in your office who have given up the fearful habit of swearing since they have been with you, yet you know though they are changed and come to Zion, they are not converted." Laying my hand on his knee, I said, "My dear fellow-worker, I would not check your

gifts even to such a movement, but I do ask you to look if there are not more worthy societies you could help."

"I have looked into that, Mr. Edwards, and taking my gifts on the lowest grounds, these people *do* more for the money than any section of Christian workers I know."

"Do they? Let us go over one or two things. Take the figures given by them as to their converts. To begin with, they are *all on one side*. There is no account given of the lapses and losses. You know figures like this are practically useless. Then how many of these so-called conversions are really 'transfers,' members of other societies, who have joined this one? We know that many of the discontented of other bodies have joined these."

"Say half, then, if you will."

"No; we let the figures stand as they give them, only remembering that the 'debit' is not given. What I want you to see is this, that the cost of reaching these *who have come from other societies has been borne by the society from whence they came*. Supposing I went to one college for three years, and to another as teacher, the cost of my education should not be reckoned in the latter but in the former. Their members bring the fervour and force of the Church which trained them with them to this new society. Think of the damage and loss sustained by other societies through the loss of these. Think of the training, the amount of Biblical, Scriptural knowledge, given by other societies compared with that they give their adherents. Think, for instance, of the kind of influence you exert compared with one of theirs. You cannot put one as equal to one in this matter. You will understand I am simply meeting your statement that you get more for your money when given to them. I ask, 'Do you?' You would not compare one hundred of theirs with one hundred of —, or say, Rowland Hill's members, as to knowledge of Scripture, influence of life and power, consequently of doing good, if the cost of one hundred might be *thrice* that of the other."

"But they have their work and their sphere of operation."

"Granted, but that does not meet your statement that you get more for your money. You may in quantity,

though I should doubt that. You do not in quality. I speak freely. You are my friend, and I know that many a five-pound note that once found its way to poor struggling village causes has gone in the direction of this society; and I am sorry, for our towns are made up of villagers, and it is money well spent that sustains our village chapels and Sunday-schools in training the young, even if there are no flourishing statistics from the village cause. Besides," I added, "if you want evangelistic movements merely, I could point you to many who do this work far better and cheaper than they do."

I had not convinced him, yet the seed sown worked its way upward, and I saw the fruit in after years.

Some few days after this I was in the home of another of my deacons. It was at the time the metropolis was in a turmoil and tumult consequent upon a parliamentary election.

"I am glad you ran in, Mr. Edwards," said my host, "for I have just been reading the speech as reported in the *Gazette* you made at Alderman Rusk's meeting. I could scarcely believe my eyes."

"So startling in its truth was it then?"

"Startling in its Radicalism you mean! A pretty pass things would come to if we placed power in the hands of the people in the way you advocated. No, no! Educate them first; give them a larger financial stake in the country before you give them so much power."

"That argument is a little late, is it not? Why should we be afraid to trust the people? We do it in other matters every day."

"Think of the low, brutal mob, and speak not of giving them political power."

"Will you not educate them, as you say, when you throw upon them the responsibility we are seeking to place upon them? Have they not a stake in our country's interest? Do they not do the work? make everything we use? Their toil is no small force in the land. Do we not well to recognise it?"

I need not tell my reader *that* deacon was a Tory in politics, and was utterly opposed to me in this matter. He did not resign his office, why should he? He had as much right to his opinion as I had to mine, and I

honoured him for it. Yet it is not always so, for through that same speech at the Radical meeting I lost a whole family, who said they could not listen to a political preacher. Had I preached a political sermon maybe they would have been justified, but I had not. I never did and never shall. The pulpit is not the place for such a partisan display. So I felt and feel, but on the platform liberty of opinion and liberty to express it is every man's right.

So the minister moves into many circles, and, if he be a man of sympathy, finds much to drain his emotional side, yet he is expected to be ever ready with a good sermon; and in one view these things which draw much upon his sympathy are no little means of education for him. "For what man knoweth the things of a man save the spirit of man which is in him?" Contact with men and men's moods and methods, thoughts, and ways, are exceedingly helpful to the man who would speak wise words to men. A faithful preacher carries a burden with him no other carries. To his mental sight there is present the inner life, the workings of the inner life of those to whom he ministers, and it is because he has in the Gospel that which meets these needs, he is able to bear the weight of this knowledge.

Seated one morning with the missionary employed by our Church, I said:

"Marshall, I want to visit one or two of those thieves' kitchens, the one in Grape Court and the other in Bradawl's Gardens."

"Dangerous work at the best of times, but if you wish to I will accompany you."

"Meet me at the chapel, and after service we will go together."

A dull cold day had been succeeded by a raw foggy evening. Just the night to find the dwellers in the dens at home, if we did not time our call too late. Partaking of a warm cup of coffee, we prepared ourselves for the visit. Threading our way up the greasy Gray's Inn Lane, we turned down a narrow alley, which led us into the place called the Gardens. The clocks were striking ten, and as we passed along, women without bonnets were standing or squatting on the door steps, here and there a man smoking the inevitable short clay pipe. I led the way to an

ordinary looking house. If there was any difference observable it was in the cleanliness of the windows. Passing up three steps into the passage, the door, of which stood open, I knocked at the room door immediately on our right. A woman, tall and stout, with bare arms and very red face, opened it. She knew me and asked us in. Lines of string were stretched from side to side of the room, from which hung various articles, fresh from the wash. Flat irons on the table, the prevalence of musty-smelling steam, told plainly that she had been busy. On the table beside the irons stood a quart pewter pot. By the fire sat a short but powerfully built man, his hair ominously cropped, evidently at his country's expense. He scowled at us and went on smoking and looking into the fire.

"Ye're foine and late, yer riverence," said the woman in a strong Irish accent. "Did ye whant anybody?"

I explained the object of our visit.

"The lads'll be glad to see ye shure." Addressing herself to the man by the fire, who by this time was moving uneasily in his chair, she said, "This is the praste as wants to do the lads a turn." This evidently satisfied the man, for he relit his pipe and settled down to gazing at the fire. Going into the passage and calling "Jim" in a loud voice, the woman handed a large brass candlestick to the owner of that name when he appeared, an ungainly looking youth with china blue eyes and a shock of perfectly red hair. "Here, show the gintleman into the parlur and tell 'em to be aisy." Jim looked us up and down a full minute, then moving very slowly, said, "Min' yer 'eds and yer feet," and the caution was not unnecessary. Down a flight of stone steps, very much the worse for wear, across the yard, down another flight of wooden stairs, and at the end of a short passage, "Jim" rapped a peculiar kind of rattle, and the door was opened by a man with one of the most villanous forms and faces I have ever seen. A head out of all proportion to his body, for his body was thin and short and his legs crooked, but his head was large enough for a giant. As he turned I observed he was also hunch-backed. With a terrible leer, which one could not call a look, he whispered to Jim and Jim whispered in return. He then preceded us and mumbled something to the assembly, the only words we could hear being "innocent," "aisy," "psalm dodgers."

What a sight met our gaze !

A large room, probably the cellars of two or three houses made into one. Forms or benches were placed alongside the walls. Two or three deal tables, saw-dusted floor, and a huge coke fire, throwing forth intense heat. Jim had placed the candle on the table, but the glow from the fire lit the room well.

"Glad to see yer honour," said a wizened-faced old man, his features marked with cunning and his eyes as restless as the sea. In front of the fire were innumerable articles of food, fish, mutton chops, beef steaks, sausages, saveloys, and one or two small saucepans. "We bin a cooking our jints," continued the wizened-faced man, "and barring yer prisince we'll ait 'em soon."

"Do not let us disturb you, my friends. We have come to have a little talk with you," and I looked round the place as I spoke. Some forty or fifty men and youths of all ages; some of most repulsive appearance, giving one a sense that our throats could not long endure the grip of their hands; others quite respectable in appearance. Two among them were blind, and I noted that these had their "jints" handed to them first, and sat eating and listening. We stood in the centre of the room and spoke to them of Jesus, of His real manhood and His divine power to save, of His sympathy, His love, His death for the lost. Excepting that they went on eating, a more attentive audience one could not wish for. Now and then a voice would break in with, "True you air," "Ah, me! them things is right;" and once my gravity was nearly upset by a squeaky voice ejaculating, "Blowed if he don't know!" I shook hands with them all round, invited them to our mission-room. One handsome fellow, about thirty years of age, held my hand and in a quick, hurried way, said, "I was a commercial traveller once, took to gambling, took money that wasn't mine; three years; when I came out what could I do? I will come to the mission." I took that to mean he did not want me to speak with him there. So I merely asked his name. Before going I stopped, came back into the centre of the room, and said, "I should like to ask God to help you; will you let me pray?" "Jes' as yer like. Cut it short though." With this permission I knelt on the saw-dusted floor, and poured out my heart in a brief prayer. Jim

escorted us from the room and giving the candlestick to the woman said, "He aint half a bad un," and made his way back, I presume, to his supper. More than once we visited this kitchen. Sad stories of wasted lives did we hear. This was before the days of the "Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society," a society which every lover of the fallen will assuredly encourage. It is a bridge across which such men as I met may walk back to honesty and progress.

Such scenes force one back on the old Galilean Gospel. Such audiences teach a man the utter worthlessness of fine words about morality. Such sinners need a Saviour who is **MIGHTY** to save.



CHAPTER XXVIII.

CHANGES.

A GLORIOUS day in June, with the sun pouring his rays of light on the toilers and pleasure seekers alike. The vicinity of Zion Chapel was all astir. Groups of children, dressed in their best! Happy, laughing faces! Merry movements! Teachers moving in and out of the crowd of children, looking at certain tickets, and arranging the scholars in order of age and class. Outside the chapel a row of pleasure vans. It is the annual excursion of the school, and many a child will have its only peep at green fields and the beautiful country. No wonder they are full of joy. All the year, the close courts and narrow streets, with the monotonous and apparently unending line of bricks and mortar, meet their gaze, accompanied by the stifling air and the unintermittent noise of the street vendors. How many an act of self-denial have their parents practised to get the clothes and buy the tickets so that their children may see the country! Only those who have laboured among the poor know what self-denial is exhibited by many a mother, ay, and father too, to enable the children to spend the one day in the happy, joyous freedom of the country. Soon all are seated, and away we go, amid the cheers of the parents who have assembled to see them off. Soon the hard, stone roadways are left behind, and we rattle along the country roads, reaching the park wherein we have obtained permission to gather. A lovely spot, some fourteen miles from London, on one of the upper reaches of the Thames. Noble trees, and soft, velvety grass, with the alluring waters of the river alongside. Swings are soon improvised, wickets pitched, and boys and girls are in full glee of romp and frolic.

There is a large assembly of adults, for we seniors make it a point of duty to be children once in the year.

How the children shout! the fresh air invigorating their lungs. The superintendents, secretaries, arranging races in and out of sacks. O what a sense of merriment! Here and there a poor crippled lad or lass is being carefully tended by the kind but robust youths; and gladness reigns supreme.

"Rose," said I, "there are fresh inquiries from Lancashire. They want me to go down again." I had thrust my letters in my pocket unopened, for we left home very early that morning and had now sought a quiet spot under one of the spreading oaks to open and read them.

"Will you go?"

There was a tone of sadness, and I knew why. Our eldest girl, who had never recovered the effects of the fever, had been sent to a school where, with lively companions and not too close attention to scholastic duties, the doctor had given us hopes of her recovery. Lately, however, the reports had not been so cheering, and a kind of haunting fear had possessed Rose which made her dread the thought of my being far away from home.

"I shall see. We are going this afternoon to see our darling. You know the school is only some three miles from here, and if she is better I think Lancashire will see me."

We rose and joined in the games with the children, and in the afternoon, while the tea was being prepared, started for Kingston to see our darling child. Beautiful indeed she looked, with her long flaxen hair falling in ringlets on her shoulders, but very frail. She clambered on my knee, showed us her reward tickets given her at Sunday school, and told us how happy she was.

"Are you *really* better, darling?"

"Yes, only my ear aches so much, but the discharge has stopped lately, and I hope I shall soon get well." She spoke eagerly, as if wishful to give us the idea of returning health, but her frail form and pallid face contradicted her words.

Very happy did she seem, nay, was. Ere we left, I said, smoothing her luxuriant hair with my hand, "Darling, do you love Jesus and try to please Him?"

"Yes, father, I do; ever since that night at home when you and mamma came to me in my bedroom. You remember, don't you?"

Remember! Should I ever forget? It was after her illness. She lay awake sobbing. I went from my study and tried to soothe her. "I am not crying for pain; I am only so glad Jesus loves me. I do not know why I cry, but it is *so good* of Him to have suffered so much for me. I will thank Him when I see Him. Dad," she always used that term in her most affectionate moments, "will you kneel down and ask Him to make me a good dutiful girl, and thank Him for dying for me?" Could I ever forget that hour? Rose knelt with me, and our darling grew quiet and fell into peaceful slumber.

"Yes," I said, "I remember. You still pray to Him, do you not, dear?"

"Of course I do, father; I love to talk with Him."

As we rode home in the quiet of that summer's evening, the happy songs and hymns rising on the still air, we were musing in gladness over that inestimable joy, a twice-born child.

A few days after this we were summoned to her bedside. She was in violent pain, so violent that laudanum pads were laid on her ears and temples. She recovered and once again was about, glad and happy.

I had answered the friends in Lancashire in the affirmative, but it was with a sad heart I entered upon a fortnight's services. The letters from Rose cheered me, however. Our darling, while not recovering strength, was better, decidedly better.

The services were again scenes of blessing, away in the hills of the County Palatine. Crowds gathered. Night after night we led the repentant to the feet of Jesus. It is a mercy that the work of preaching the Gospel carries with it its own blessing, for my anxiety concerning home was very great. I knew that Rose was burdened, and many a time I wondered whether I was right in leaving her thus; yet the blessing received in my labour and on my labour seemed to indicate that I was doing my duty. But it was with keen anxiety I opened the letters from home, and sometimes it required no little force of prayerful desire to keep my thoughts to my work.

The last morning of the fortnight dawned. A dull windy day. The wind rustling the leaves and flinging the dust in contempt before it. It blustered round the cottages on the road to the railway station, made the sign

boards over the public-houses creak and swing. Now and then, as if angry with some inmate, it would unceremoniously open the door, laugh its hollow laugh, and then career away to the bleak open moor to finish its laugh, or rather to take fresh force and whirl away to the sea.

I had left the home of my friend, saying, "If any letters come you will bring them when you come to the service this evening." I was on my way to stay a little while at the house of the minister in whose chapel the afternoon and evening services were to be held. The wind suited me. Its mad whirl seemed to answer the eager wish of my soul to fly off home, and I watched its effects with something akin to sympathy. I had reached the steps leading up to the platform of the station, and was about to take my ticket when I heard my name called. Turning quickly, I saw the minister of the town holding up one of those reddy yellow envelopes which are synonymous with the telegram within the cover. I took it almost abruptly from his hands and read, and the words seemed written in fire.

"Our darling passed away this morning. Come home."

I reeled and staggered as if I had been hit, and should have fallen but for my friend, who placed his arm around me saying, "Poor fellow! Is it bad news?" I was dumb. I could not make haste; I moved slowly to the ticket office.

"London. When is next train?"

"In two minutes. Cross the line."

My friend dragged me, for I moved as one palsied, across the line. The train came in, I entered the carriage, the whistle sounded, and without a word we parted. Fortunately the compartment was an empty one. I flung myself on my knees, and in silence I bowed. Not a word could I speak. Not a tear could I shed. My eyes, skin, tongue, soul were dry. We changed trains at Manchester. In the same dry, aching mood I entered the cab, and was driven across to the London Road terminus, caught the train and was again fortunate in having a compartment to myself. We were nearing Leicester when words came. "O God, how hard! I was out on Thy work. I did not see her. My first-born is dead." Then came the tears. Not for long. One great burst that strained my heart's

strings; and taking my pocket Bible I read: "He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust." Oh! how I hugged those words to my soul. He is not angry with me. He knows my frame.


How can I tell of that ride to London, and that worse ride through London to the quiet school on the Thames! What rebellious thoughts! What fearful paroxysms of fevered sorrow! Entering the house I was ushered up into *her* room. Rose met me, her eyes swollen and red with weeping, and there, cold and lovely, lay the marble form of my first-born. I kissed the firm lips; I stroked the flaxen hair, and then, then, I *felt* the everlasting arms, and was quiet.

On Sunday none among the listeners could have known the bitter tempest that had been raging in my heart, for the old voice had rung forth, hushing it to calm, "It is I; be not afraid." My text was, "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." Let the funeral pass and all its sad train of memories.

I locked away in my desk a little purse, inside of which, besides the stamps and some coins, were the reward tickets given my darling by her teacher at Sunday-school. I know not the teacher, but I have many a time blessed her memory. It is with no semi-idolatry I turn at times to look at that purse, but when my heart is hot with disappointment and grief I look at them, and memory instantly recalls the blessed strength God gave me in those hours of trial, and the tears are dried. "A little child shall lead them."

I often wondered why I was enabled to be so calm, but, reader, a few days after my abrupt departure from Lancashire I had a letter in which I was told that the friends to whom I was expected to preach, hearing of my loss, turned the meeting into one of prayer for me. Was not that the explanation?

Who can tell how that trial altered me? Heaven seemed nearer, and, until the shadows fall, Rose and I resolved to labour more earnestly for Him who had folded our lamb amid the eternal springs of love.



CHAPTER XXIX.

FURTHER CHANGES.

TIME passed, and the days of our annual holiday drew near. I had been on several short tours of evangelistic effort, but only for two or three days at a time. The reason for this was that our baby, born just after our darling's death, was very ailing. The doctor had given up hope of its life. We were determined in our choice of place for holiday through this circumstance.

Among the letters one morning at breakfast I handed one to Rose.

"At the Church-meeting held ———, it was unanimously resolved to invite you to become our Pastor."

Rose read it, and holding it in her hand, said, "Well?"

"Well," I replied, "what think you?"

"I do not know what to think; we are very comfortable and happy here."

"I know very little of the people from whom this invitation has come; but read this," handing her another letter. This was from one of the leaders in our denomination urging me to consider well this call.

"You need wisdom from above, Arnold,"

I sought my study. What shall I do? Common enough to hear it said, "Oh! any call that carries one to a larger sphere and salary is sure to be accepted." Nor need we wonder it is so said, for most folk measure other people's corn by their own bushel. But to a man who has lived to see a neglected, almost empty, chapel filled, who has gathered around him loving hearts and true friends who prize his ministry, who has watched

the youth grow to man and womanhood, who has married them, buried their loved ones, sorrowed in their sorrow, rejoiced in their joys, who has around him some who once were infidel and wildly wicked, now transformed into noble workers for Christ, who has woven around him ties sweetly sacred, such a man finds it hard to decide that any unknown people can claim him as theirs.

"He does his work and receives his pay, and if he can better himself he has a right to."

Yes, but that, after all, is the *smallest item* of the whole. Sit with me, reader, and listen a minute to the thoughts that passed through my mind.

"Another can do the work *there* as well as you can. Another may go there as much called of God as you. But the people have been praying for guidance, and they have been led to ask you. Is not their voice so far the voice of God to you? It is a much larger sphere, opens the very opportunities for which you have longed, and as the salary is not much larger, you can the better accept with no clog of sordid gain upon your decision.

"Your own people love you. The Church is growing and is strong. You are advancing in the denomination, on its Committee and its places of honour. Why give up all these? Besides the place to which you are asked is in low water, very much burdened, and will give you great anxiety and care."

I knelt, but my prayer was uncertain. Spray dashing from meeting currents of opposing streams. Not the foam from the united dash of the mingling waves, no, not that, but the agony aspirations that fly up when opposing waves meet.

I went out to consult my old friend and deacon, Captain Macdonald. Four times before had I gone on the same errand. He had been ailing and fading for some little time past. As I entered he was lying on the couch. "You must not go while I live," he said. Poor old man! His memory was leaving him, but he brightened up as he talked. "Rather selfish, is it not?" I said.

"Yes, may be, but you know what a comfort the services are to me."

Sunday morning came, and I told my deacons. They have a right to a pastor's confidence.

"Will you go?" said Dionysius Rasper.

"As I feel now, no, brethren. I am waiting for guidance. Will you seek it for me and with me?"

"Do not say anything to the people yet, will you?"

"No, not until I know my own mind, and not then if I determine to stay."

Next day we were off to a lovely little nook on the Norfolk coast, a favourite retreat for ministers, and no wonder. The sea rolls in from the German Ocean. The houses are mostly within easy reach of the smooth wide-spreading beach, and the country is open and agricultural—haven of healthful rest!

Lying one morning on the sands, reading to Rose, a familiar voice said, "This is the way to do it."

"Why, Blackman! you know the parsons' resort then?"

I showed him the letter of invitation as we lolled and talked. "If you go you will be a fool, Edwards." This was his blunt, good-humoured way of protesting.

"Why?"

"Why! Leaving London just as you are making your influence felt, and finding recognition among the workers in the Union. You are doing a good work; happy and prospered. What on earth do you want to leave for?" and he flung a stone into the rippling waves, as if to give emphasis to his repeated declaration, "You will be foolish."

It was no good arguing or explaining. He would hear nothing. I was mad if I went. "Go on reading; sorry I stopped you. Let's have a chapter, for I see it is the 'Old Curiosity Shop' you have there. Go on."

I was reading that wonderful word picture, so full of light and shade, and began:

"She was dead. No sleep so beautiful and calm, so free from trace of pain, so fair to look upon. She seemed a creature fresh from the hand of God, waiting for the breath of life, not one who had lived and suffered death.

"Her couch was dressed here and there with some winter berries and green leaves, gathered in a spot she used to favour. 'When I die put me something that has loved the light and had the sky above it always.' Those were her words.

"The old man held one languid arm in his, and had the

small hand tight folded to his breast for warmth. It was the hand she had stretched out to him with her last smile—the hand that had led him on through all his wanderings.

“It is not on earth that Heaven’s justice ends. Think what earth is, compared to the world to which her young spirit has winged its early flight, and say if one deliberate wish expressed in solemn tones above this bed could call her back to life, which of us could utter it?”

The tears choked me; I could read no more. Blackman was wiping his away, and Rose had pressed my hand with bowed head. No word was uttered, but involuntarily we were each looking across the gleaming waters to where the horizon touched them, with fixed gaze, as if we would pierce the invisible. Only a month before Blackman had buried a beautiful boy, and Rose and I were thinking of our darling in her new home.

Blackman’s hand sought mine; my other clasped Rose’s. A thrill of real sympathy passed, as Blackman said slowly, “Hard work *not* to wish that sometimes.”

“They will greet us in the harbour,” I said.

“And minister to us while we sail,” added Rose.

The answer had not been sent to the invitation. I had consulted friends, pondered and prayed, and at last wrote stating that certain radical changes in their constitution as a Church, their management and practices, would have to be made before I could accept the charge. In a few days there came to my intense surprise this answer, “Conditions accepted; when will you commence?”

The matter was thus *settled for me*. I did not want to go, yet could not find a really sufficient reason why I should not. I at once wrote the secretary of Zion and my warm and aged friend, Captain Macdonald. He had passed a night of more than usual suffering. The attendant gave him my letter in the morning. He read it and laid it on the bed. After a little while he asked for it, read it again, closed his eyes and passed away from earth. I was very pained when I heard this. Truly his words were fulfilled. I did not leave Zion while he lived.

Having decided to commence in my new sphere almost

directly, so as to shorten the painful interval, the Sunday soon came in which I was to bid my old flock farewell. The old chapel never seemed so dear to me. The alterations and additions never looked so well as on that Sunday evening when the congregation thronged every inch of space. Among the audience my mother, father, brother, and three sisters. Years had seen many changes. My brother's eldest son was a student in the same College of which you have heard, reader. My brother and his wife now attended the Baptist chapel in the suburb in which they resided. Only one of the family was still an attendant at the Established Church. On many a face as my eye rested I read the blessing of God on my ministry. Dear old Zion! scene of such heartache and toil! scene of such blessing and triumph. Is it to be wondered at if the tears were in my eyes, as for the last time as Pastor of Zion I should stand among those people? Is it a wonder that I thought of the first time I stood there, a weak helpless man, with a chapel almost empty and an almost hopeless burden of debt? Is it a wonder that I urged upon them unity of purpose and holy waiting upon God? that I wooed them to seek a better, more earnest man than I had been? or that I thanked them for all their kindness toward my shortcomings? Nor need I add that on the following day, when in happy meeting they gave me token of their love, that I could truly say, I left them loving them still. I had not sought the new sphere, as I had not in the years gone by sought Zion. Not one letter, not one word had I ever written or uttered that would lead any Church to ask me away from Zion. If ever a man was led by the Hand Divine I had been. *The voice of God is sure to be heard; if we will only wait for Him we shall never be confounded.* I know that introductions to other Churches are sought, when the heart has grown weary with disappointments, but I also know, if any one has been called of God to work in any sphere for Him, he should wait *there* till the voice of God as clearly demands that he move. *God knows where His workers are.* No man shall fail directions who lifts his eyes unto the Lord. No combination of circumstances can keep back those He calls. None the less is it true that to wait sometimes is tiring to the soul and wearing to the spirit. There is an attitude of soul which is quick to see the dealings of the Lord. "Wait, I say, on the

Lord." The divine call is no more "effete" than the divine Lord Himself.

The next day we were eating our dinner in our new house, amid the din and clatter of the men bringing in the furniture, and ere the night closed we had so far advanced in our arrangements that we lay down in comfort.



CHAPTER XXX.

AND LAST.

MY task is over. About my new sphere my tongue is still. The time has not come to write of it. I am sitting with my pen idly resting in my hand, my mind dwelling on the past through which I have taken my reader. My mother and father are yet alive and members with us in our new sphere. They could not rest away from the boy they had prayed into the fold. Their steps are feeble, their forms bent, and the frosts of many winters have silvered their heads. They are never absent if attendance on the means of grace is in any way possible ; as mother once said, "I must hear my boy as long as I can on earth ; I'll not need to hear him in the next world." Dear faithful parents ! God's best blessings be on you. You led my infant feet to the house of God. You trained my youthful mind to think of better things, and some sweet day we will worship the King in the far-off land.

When I was at Zion last, at the school anniversary, Dionysius Rasper was yet alive, rubbing the invisible dust from his hands. He welcomed me with real warmth. Time has dealt gently with him and he has more trust in his fellow-men than he had.


Mr. Bostall's shiny head and sunny face "was not," but his widow told me he died in peace. I missed him much, for his cheery countenance was a gleam of light to any preacher he might listen to.

None of the other deacons are at Zion. Change of residence has removed them from its influence. They are with other Churches. Peace go with them.

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I see them all, and not only these, but many old companions live again. But where are they? And while I sit musing thus, Rose lays her hand on my shoulder. "Have you not finished? To-morrow's joyful duties need that you rest a little on Saturday night." I look up at that still sweet face. There are threads of silver in the raven tresses, but the same calm trustful look is there. I unlock a drawer and taking from thence a photograph, we read together, as we gaze on the stone pictured there, "In loving memory of Ethel, aged eleven years. 'Lifted higher.'"

We turn away arm in arm to mix with our other precious children in the evening hour of play.



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